



NEW
FRIENDS *in* OLD
CHESTER

MARGARET DELAND

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NEW FRIENDS IN OLD CHESTER

By MARGARET DELAND

Author of
The Vehement Flame

This volume is in a sense three books in one, for it consists of three novelettes. The first, "An Old Chester Secret," tells of Miss Lydia Sampson's adoption of the boy whom she called Johnnie Smith, of her loyalty to him in the face of base suspicions, and of the bitter conflict of wills when Johnnie's real parents tried to take him from her.

The second, "When Old Chester Wondered," is the story of Rose Knight, braving the gossip of the town to save the man she loved. The third, "The Eliot's Katy," is a masterpiece of mother-love; it tells of the great-hearted sacrifice of the unlettered little Cockney cook, who publicly denied her daughter that the girl might be free to play the part of a "lady" in the world.

LOOK ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS JACKET

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NEW FRIENDS
IN OLD CHESTER





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PRESSING THEM CLOSE TO HER, KATY PRODUCED TWO LITTLE PACKAGES

NEW FRIENDS IN OLD CHESTER

BY
MARGARET DELAND

AUTHOR OF
THE VEHEMENT FLAME,
OLD CHESTER TALES, ETC.



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M-Y

TO LORIN

These Stories of Old Chester

October 14, 1923
Kennebunkport,
Maine

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THE ELIOTS' KATY

“Wheresoever thou findest God manifest-
ing Himself in love, there thou findest
Heaven, without travelling for it so
much as one foot.”

—“Dialogues of the
Super-sensual Life.”

CHAPTER I.

I SUPPOSE a few Old Chester housekeepers did know the meaning of the phrase "domestic problem"; but if so, they didn't talk about it. An allusion to anything so personal as your kitchen was thought, in Old Chester, to be indecorous. And as for changing servants frequently, *that* was vulgar!... "There must be something peculiar about Mrs. So-and-so, she has had three different girls in a year." "You don't say so! Well, I have never thought her a person of much gentility. Probably her grandmother didn't have servants."

With this standard of "gentility" was a patriarchal sense of responsibility for the woman in the kitchen. A real Old Chester housekeeper (not one of the new people, of course) concerned herself anxiously, and sometimes prayerfully, about the manners and morals of her domestics.... I wonder, do our daughters pray for their cooks? Well, they might do worse!... But imagine saying, in these days—as Old Chester housekeepers used to say—"Your hat is too showy, Mary; it is not suitable to your station. And also I must tell you that no respectable young woman is seen on the streets after dark without a male companion—who is, of course, a worthy young man of whom her parents approve. Therefore, if you are alone, you must return, on your evenings out, by eight o'clock in

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summer, and half-past seven in the winter months. These are my rules."

But all that is in the dim past; this story of the Eliots' Katy is just a memory of Old Chester's peace in days when, between mistress and maid, the incredible simplicity of loyalty and human kindness, of conscience and dignity and responsibility, *worked!*—and only the new people, who certainly never prayed for their "girls," had domestic problems.

It was one of these "new" people, Ruth Eliot, who took into her household a young English woman, who was practically a vagrant. The Eliots (though Unitarians) were nice enough; in fact, his father had been born in Old Chester; but she was a New Yorker, "and you know what *that* means!" said Old Chester. It explained, we thought, why she employed a girl who had no reference—except the hesitating approval of Mrs. Van Horn, the landlady at the Tavern.

The woman had arrived in Old Chester one November night at about half-past ten, on foot, in the rain. She had no umbrella—she couldn't have carried it if she had, for she was lugging a big bundle wrapped in shiny black oilcloth, and the strings cut deep into first one stout hand, and then into the other. She had a shawl over her head, and hobnail shoes on her feet. When she reached the Tavern, the Van Horns, behind their solid wooden shutters, had been sound asleep for an hour or two. Not a pin point of light could be seen, but somehow she seemed to know that it was a public house; perhaps the creaking of the old sign, swaying in the rain, informed her. At the door she fumbled in the darkness for the bell, dangling from its socket on a rusty wire.

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She pulled it; waited; pulled again; heard a faint jangle far back in the sleeping house—and pulled once more. Van Horn, on the third floor, got out of bed, and still half asleep, came clumping down stairs; when, holding his candle above his head, he blinked out into the wet darkness, he said, briefly, "I swan!" The girl's face, which had been rosy with the driving rain, was whitening with exhaustion; her shawl, pinned under her chin, was dripping wet, and some locks of hair were plastered across her forehead. "Who are you?" said Van Horn.

"I'm Katy McGrath, sir; I'm lookin' fer work."

"At this time of night?" said Van Horn; "where did you come from?"

"Mercer; if yer please, sir."

"Mercer! Young woman, you ain't *walked* that distance?"

"Yes, if yer please, sir."

"A girl, traipsing the road!" He paused and rubbed one big bare foot over the other. "Well," he said, sharply, "I can't stand here and freeze. Step in. For a minute."

She stepped in, then said faintly, "May I sit me down, sir? Me legs is givin' way." She was really crumpling up with fatigue, and Van Horn, putting out a steadying hand, guided her into the hall, where she sank down on the lowest step of the staircase.

"Well, I swan!" the landlord said again; then called: "Hey! Mother! Lookee here: a young miss."

Mrs. Van Horn, in curl papers and a wadded bed jacket, had been hanging over the banisters, listening; she came now, ponderously, down stairs. She paused on the step above the sagging figure, and looked at

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the shawled head, drooping against the banisters. "What's this? What's this?" she demanded.

"I don't know," said her husband; "look at her! Sopping."

"Joshua," said Mrs. Van Horn, "this is no place for you. *I'll* see to her!"

"I wouldn't be too hard on her," old Van Horn said, uneasily; "even if she is a traipser, don't turn her out in the rain."

"Mr. Van Horn," said his wife, "I don't need to be told by a man in his night shirt, how to treat a young woman—*of this sort*. Go on up to your bed. Don't take the candle! Do you think I want to be left in the dark with her? She may try to murder me! Girl, are you hungry?"

"Yes, mum; but don't yer give me a thought, mum. If I might just sit 'ere—"

"And walk off with the teaspoons, I suppose, before we are up in the morning?" said Mrs. Van Horn. "Follow me!" she commanded, and, candle in hand, strode along the hall to the kitchen, leaving her husband to climb upstairs as well as he could in the dark. Katy, her knees bending under her, picked up the bundle and followed in the wake of the waddling, kindly figure. In the kitchen, the candle flickering between them on the table, came more orders, always in a terrible voice: "Put that bundle in the sink! Do you hear me? I don't want it dripping all over the floor! Sit down."

The girl silently did as she was bid, but she watched Mrs. Van Horn, going in and out of the pantry, with eager eyes, and when food was placed before her, fell on it, stuffing it into her mouth and

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straining to swallow it with the strangling hunger of fatigue. Mrs. Van Horn, looking at her, suddenly turned and went puffing upstairs; when she came back (calling over her shoulder, "No, Mr. Van Horn! It's no place for you. Stay where you are") she brought with her a fat black bottle. She poured a good two fingers of whisky into a tumbler, and held it out to the girl: "Take it." Katy took it, her teeth clicking against the glass held in both shaking hands. She ate every crumb of food, even running the blade of her knife round her plate and closing her lips on it, so that nothing should escape her.

Watching her, Mrs. Van Horn said, slowly, "A girl, traipsing the public road at this time of night! Well, I wasn't born yesterday. I know what that means. . . . You can stay the rest of the night here, *if you are willing I should lock you up?* If you ain't you can go."

"Oh, yes, mum, I'm willin'! I am indeed. Lock me up, and thank yer kindly, mum."

"Then," said Mrs. Van Horn again, "follow me!" She picked up the candle, and the girl picked up her bundle, and together, silently, they climbed the back stairs to a little room tucked under the sloping roof of the garret. Katy looked at the bed with passionate longing; it seemed as if she couldn't wait to get into it. Her eyes were dropping shut with exhaustion, and her hands trembled so that she couldn't unfasten her wet clothes. Mrs. Van Horn, observing her, unhooked her dress; then she opened the black oil-cloth bundle and took out a nightgown—rough and clumsy, and of unbleached cotton, but clean. She put it over the girl's head, then turned back the sheets

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and helped her into bed. Katy fell on the soft, generous pillows, and slept almost instantly.

Mrs. Van Horn, candle in hand, stood looking down at her. Her hard, honest face gathered into puzzled lines. "She's a big, strapping girl; twenty miles is no such long walk—if *she was strong*. But she's weak. What would make the likes of her weak?" she pondered. "I've had eight children," she said; "*I* couldn't 'a walked twenty miles under two months." She bent over and looked at the face, very pale and with dark circles under the eyes. Then she looked at the left hand, worn and callous, lying palm upward on the coverlet; there was no ring on the third finger. "I'm afraid that's it," she said to herself; "but she's honest; I can see that." And when she went to her sleeping Joshua she left the door of the little room unlocked.

CHAPTER II

ALL that the Van Horns knew of the storm-beaten creature was what, later, Katy, with placid brevity, told the harsh, kind woman who had the intuition not to lock the door of the attic bedroom. She said that she had come from England to better herself in America; she had been told that servants could get places in Pennsylvania, so she had taken the journey over the mountains to Mercer. "And I 'eard of Old Chester, mum, but I 'adn't the price of the stage, so I' walked. Well, I got tired, mum, or I'd 'a been 'ere earlier. You was kind to me!" she said; "no; I h'ain't got no 'character';—I never told a lie, mum, I didn't live out at 'ome, so I h'ain't got one." She looked anxiously at Mrs. Horn to see whether such an admission would put her on the road again.

This meager information had not been given all at once. It came little by little during the next few days, for the Van Horns, grudgingly (but with no concern about the teaspoons), let her stay on. "She works well," Mrs. Van Horn said to Joshua, "and she washes dishes like a piously brought up girl—she don't leave egg on the prongs of the forks." Then she told Katy, "You may stay till Monday." And by and by, "you may stay till next Monday." . . . She stayed a year and a half. Sleeping, without complaint, in the niche under the roof, suffocatingly hot in summer,

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freezing cold in winter; working as the Van Horns had never seen a girl work; accepting gratefully the poor pay they offered—and never spending a cent of it, so it seemed, on herself! “She’s truthful,” Mrs. Van Horn said, “she *could* ’a said she’d lost her reference, but she didn’t. And she ain’t vain—like these trollops that go into service now-a-days, putting all their money on their backs, and wearing clothes that might be their ladies’!”

She was right in both statements. Katy either told the truth, or held her tongue; and certainly she was not vain! She still wore the plaid shawl over her head, and she was constantly patching her clothes. In summer she went barefoot, except on Sundays. And she had never a ribbon for her neck, Mrs. Van Horn observed, “nor a bit of a trinket, like most silly females!” No; Katy’s money certainly didn’t “go on her back.” Once or twice Mrs. Van Horn saw her put her wages in an envelope, which she carried to the post office. “I guess,” she speculated, “she sends her pay home.”

“Likely,” said Joshua; “she’s a dutiful young woman.” Once he blurted out a question: “Do you send your money to your parents, Katy?”

“No, sir,” she said, cheerfully; “I never ’ad no parents. I was a charity child.” At which the Van Horns were more perplexed than ever, for as Katy stayed on she continued to post those monthly envelopes. It became evident, by and by, that she must have brought them with her, already addressed, for she could neither read nor write. It was the discovery of her illiteracy—a discovery which did not in the least embarrass her—that made Mrs. Van Horn ask

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her if she would like to learn her letters. She said, eagerly, "Oh, that I would, mum!"

It was in this way that the New York Mrs. Eliot came to know her. Katy, in her hobnail shoes and with her little shawl over her head, had gone to Sunday School—Mrs. Van Horn saw to that! (What would happen to a housekeeper nowadays, if she told her maid to go to Sunday School?) But Mrs. Van Horn gave her orders, and Katy found herself in Mrs. Eliot's class. Her cheerful stupidity, her truthfulness (which she said once "was beat into me at the work-'ouse," and was plainly based on an artless fear of hell) and, of course, her real desire to learn, moved Ruth Eliot to attempt to teach her to read and write. But though they got as far as the first half of *Reading Without Tears*, when it came to writing, Katy never did more than make—her tongue sticking out of the corner of her mouth—a few pages of pot hooks; so the monthly envelopes, into which she put her wages, must still have been sent to her with the address upon them. But she mailed them herself, so the Van Horns only knew, by asking judicious questions at the post office, that they went to somebody called Jones, in Mercer. It was when she had been at the Tavern a year and a half that, reluctantly, they let her go; a widowed daughter-in-law was coming to live with them, so Katy's services were no longer needed. "But my poor son's wife won't do the work in a week that Katy's done in a day!" Mrs. Van Horn bemoaned herself; "she hasn't the strength in her bones! And I'll have to give *her* a real bedroom."

Katy's strength had indeed been more than one finds in a daughter-in-law! After the first week at

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the Tavern, as her delicate whiteness, so suggestive of past illness, wore away, her physical power was very striking. She made one think of a heifer—sound, young limbs, calm, ruminating eyes, and large muscles, moving smoothly under satin-clean skin. Even in that first year the “strength in her bones” developed into breadth and heaviness. Her broadening back (which sometimes carried bags of potatoes down the cellar, or trunks and boxes up the tavern staircase) and her powerful legs and arms suggested the women of the fields of Europe. She was a peasant, in mind as well as in body; steady, dull, powerful, and sweet! And of a cleanness that was like June clover. No wonder, when the Van Horn’s daughter-in-law was expected, Old Chester housekeepers were interested—though somewhat doubtfully, “for no one knows anything about her!” they said. It was Mrs. Eliot who, while other ladies were thinking of the night Katy had stumbled, without a “character,” into the Tavern—it was Ruth Eliot who said, “What earthly difference does that make? I hope I’ll have the luck to get her!”

She got her. As soon as she heard of the expected daughter-in-law she walked into Old Chester, and standing smiling at the kitchen door of the Tavern, said, in her rather loud New York voice, and dropping all her “r’s,” “Mrs. Van Ho’n, I want Katy when she leaves you.”

“I don’t know what I’m going to do without her,” Mrs. Van Horn said, sighing; “Katy! Mrs. Eliot wants you.”

Katy, turning from the wash tub, ducked a sort of curtsy, then she said, “I’m not wishful to leave me

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mistress. She was kind to me. I h'ain't one to forget. But 'er daughter-in-law is coming, so I've got to find me a place."

"Well, my place is all ready for you," said Mrs. Eliot—"if you don't mind being rather far from neighbors. We are away out on the Hill Road! You won't be lonely, will you?"

"I never get time from me work fer lonesomeness," Katy said, simply.

As for those hesitating housekeepers, something happened just before Katy transferred herself and her black oilcloth bundle to the Eliots' kitchen and garret, which showed how wise they had been to hesitate: Katy disappeared, absolutely and completely, for one day and two nights; and when she got back she offered no explanation of her absence! She had told Mrs. Van Horn after supper that she was "going away," and had asked for her pay; when it was given to her, she thrust it into the bosom of her dress, and said, "I'm starting, mum, now."

"*Now!*" said Mrs. Van Horn; "why where are you going, at this time of night?"

"To Mercer, mum," said Katy.

"But, Katy," her mistress protested, "there's no stage to-night!"

Katy gave her a horrified look; "I'll never take no stage while I 'as me legs." So, leaving the Van Horns consumed with disapproving curiosity, off she trudged into the May dusk, barefoot, her big shoes hung by their knotted strings round her neck, and her little shawl over her head. When she got back, thirty-six hours later, tired and uncommunicative and placid, Tavern inquisitiveness flared up into all sorts of side-

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wise questions, to which Katy was dumb. Yet there was no suggestion of secretiveness about her; her silence was only the mild, impenetrable dignity of an animal, against which prying is powerless. "But it's my duty to tell Mrs. Eliot about it," Mrs. Van Horn said to her Joshua. She did so, and Ruth Eliot looked thoughtful for a minute.

"She seems to be a respectable young woman," Mrs. Van Horn admitted; "'Course, she'll eat you out of house and home! And she likes her liquor once in a while, same as anyone—though she don't drink heavy—I'll say that for her. And I haven't caught her lying once; and she's industrious—as girls go now-a-days. But she spent two nights out, *and no one knows where!* I thought it was proper, ma'am, to mention it to you."

Mrs. Eliot nodded. "Well, I think we can feed her! And as long as she doesn't fib, and her work is satisfactory, I'll not try to find out 'where.' It won't be my business," said Ruth Eliot. Mrs. Van Horn, who had acted from a sense of duty, was rather affronted, and agreed with those other Old Chester housekeepers that Mrs. Eliot was a "reg'lar New Yorker!"

Katy, however, did not object to New York methods. She went to the Eliots, and never "fibbed," and her work was eminently "satisfactory!" She toiled day in and day out; she cooked, and washed, and scrubbed, and served, and sewed; and the Eliot household increased, and the work increased, and Katy's wages did not increase (they couldn't! Mr. Eliot was a schoolmaster at the Female Academy in Upper Chester. In this connection a comment he

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made on Katy, apropos of those pot hooks, is interesting: "For God's sake, Ruth, don't educate her! She's perfect. Education," said James Eliot, "ruins much good raw material. My collars are wonderful!")

So, in uncorrupted ignorance, loving and serving the New York Eliots, Katy grew more broad-backed and handsome and placid every year. She did not grow more communicative, nor did she become extravagant—unless you call a penny every Sunday in the collection an extravagance? Once in a while, and apparently with actual suffering, she did buy clothing for herself, but never until sheer decency demanded it! She depended on the Eliot Christmas presents—a new little plaid shawl to wear over her burnished brown head, or calico for a dress, or hanks of blue and white yarn for stockings, which she knit in the evenings for herself—that is, when she was not knitting stockings for the two little Eliot girls! Every month she put part of her wages in the bank, and part in an envelope which she herself carried to the post office. And once a year she slipped out into the night and disappeared for thirty-six hours. Mrs. Eliot, still holding to what was and was not her business, asked no questions; but after one of these disappearances—and reappearances in time to get breakfast—the four-year-old Marion Eliot said, "Where did you go, Katy?" And Katy said, "To Mercer, dearie." As she said it little Maggie, hugging her hard, discovered a shoe string round her strong, white neck, and pulling it, jerked out a locket.

Instantly Marion began to vociferate, "Katy's got a locket! Katy!—Open it, open it!" and Katy

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rescuing the locket ("gold" studded with "diamonds"), thrust it back into her bosom, and said, "Get along with yer! Don't bother me!" Then she kissed them—great smacks!—"after breakfast, come back and see what I've got fer *good* children. 'Ave yer been good?"

"Oh, yes, Katy! We were awfully good! Ask mother—" So, later, behold them, pressing excitedly very close to her, and Katy producing two little packages: a jew's harp! a mug! She was herself excited by this first plunge into "extravagance," for truly her gifts must have amounted in all to a quarter of a dollar, and except for the stamp once a month, and the penny every Sunday in the contribution box, and the rare and agonizingly reluctant expenditures for clothing, Katy had never been known to spend one single cent on anything.

"*Now* show us the locket!" said Marion Eliot.

But Katy only pressed her big hand on her bosom where the locket lay, and laughed and said, "Get along with yer." . . .

Her devotion to the physical welfare of the children knew no bounds of toil; but she was concerned for their spiritual welfare, too, and instructed them as to the salvation of their souls: "Don't you be tellin' wrong stories, or you'll be put in 'ell. Me lady learned me that when I was in the work'ouse." She discriminated between stories and wrong stories, for when, in some rare moment of leisure, she played with the little Eliots, gamboling about like a playful cow, she sometimes turned the play into a fairy tale—talking animals! kings and queens who flew about! great folk, "like me lady," who wore gold dresses.

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Here she was apt to add fact to fancy: "She used to come down from the 'all, oncet a week, and teach us; Lady Clarissy Shotwell, she was; an' she said, 'Don't tell wrong stories; and don't never be crool, *that'll* put yer in 'ell, too,' me lady said. . . . But them flyin' kings is just a story." Katy was never known to be cross to the Eliot children, no matter how they teased her, unless she detected "croolness"; *that*, to a worm even, made her so furiously angry that her words were rough to a point of coarseness which would certainly have shocked "me lady."

For five years this was Katy's life in Old Chester. Everybody respected her, and the Eliots loved her, and nobody knew her. Then, abruptly, Mrs. Eliot knew her very well. . . . It was in January, and frightfully cold. So cold that the children were kept indoors all day, and Katy, bringing them into the kitchen, had amused them by one of her romances about the wee folk—carefully reminding them, however, that all she said was "just a tale." When the evening mail arrived, bringing a letter for the benign and tired maid-of-all-work, little Maggie, stealing Katy's shawl and pinning it over her own curly head, went careering out to the kitchen with it, making a game of hiding it, and running down to the cellar and up to the garret, Katy at her heels, coaxing and threatening, "There, Miss Myggie, stop it! Gimme that letter or I'll smack yer!" Her round eyes were a little rounder and their calmness had been blown out by some wind of fright. "I h'ain't got time to fool. Gimme it!" She caught the child at last as, shrieking, Maggie was scurrying across the kitchen floor, snatched the letter, thrust it into her bosom,

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cuffed the child softly, and gave her a kiss and two crullers. But as she waited on table that night she forgot things, and began to "take away" before the children had finished their dessert (Professor Eliot, as it happened, was not at home, and Katy always "let down" when the master was away). But after supper, when the little girls ran out to the kitchen with some nonsense, she was standing at a sinkful of unwashed dishes, her forehead twisted into frowning effort to read that letter; apparently she didn't even hear the children. She was saying aloud:

"L-i-s'—'L-i-s'—yes; it's that—'Lissy.' But what's the next? Me God, what is it? 'Lissy is t-o-o-k'—is it 'took?' Oh, I can't read it." . . . She gave a sort of groan, and the tears gushed over her cheeks. The little girls dropped into terrified silence, then Marion said to her sister, "Come on away, you!" and marshaled Maggie out of the kitchen. In the sitting room they were both so subdued that their mother, who was generally able to read when they were playing at the tops of their voices, looked up from her book, startled at the silence.

"What's the matter?" she said; and Marion said, "mother!" then she gasped: "*Katy's crying.*" It was as if one should say, "The world has come to an end!"

"Have you children been teasing her?" Mrs. Eliot said, sternly. But she did not wait for Marion's scared protest that they had been perfectly good; she went quickly out to the kitchen, and there was Katy, indeed "crying," her tears falling on a letter held in her two shaking hands.

"Katy!" said Mrs. Eliot; "what is the matter?"

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"Oh, mum—I can't read! Oh, why didn't I get learned to read? I don't know what it's sayin'!"

"Let me read it to you," Ruth Eliot said, in her kind voice. There was a moment's hesitation; then Katy made a helpless gesture.

"I got to know. I *got* to! Mebbe she's . . . dead." She gave her lady the letter, a flimsy, gilt-edged page covered with a laborious scrawl, and stood, ghastly white, clutching at the table, her agonized eyes staring at her mistress. "Read!" she commanded, hoarsely.

Mrs. Eliot, taking in the tenor of the pallid sheet, said, quickly, "Katy, no! No one is 'dead!' Don't be so frightened; it's only sickness; 'Lissy is took sick,' " she spelled out. Katy, tumbling into a chair, dropped her head on her arms flung out on the table; then came loud, tearing, animal sounds, that made Mrs. Eliot shiver; broken words, groans of relief: "Not dead—not dead."

The two little girls had been standing, open mouthed, looking on; but at this cataclysm in their steady universe, Marion began to cry, and slunk away out of the room; but little Maggie came and pulled Katy's apron, and said, "Don't cry!" Then she tried to climb into that soft, hospitable lap, which for all her life had been a refuge from the tiny despairs of childhood. At her touch, Katy, still shaking with sobs, put an arm around her, then lifted her on to her knee; "There, there, me little love," she said, soothingly, and tried to smile; "don't be frightened!"

"Katy, listen," Ruth Eliot entreated; "I don't believe things are so very bad. It says: 'Something the matter with her stum—stum—ock.' Oh, yes, 'her stomach.' Why, Katy! You know that's nothing

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very bad. Everybody has stomach upsets once in a while! Is it your sister?"

"I'll get along to Mercer, mum," Katy said, "if yer'll be givin' me lief. I'll go anyway, mum. But I'll ask yer lief—"

"Of *course*!" Mrs. Eliot said; "but wait till I read the last part: 'the doctor come three times. He said she was bad. I paid him a dollar each time. I thot I better tell you, so you can maybe come—' "

Katy, listening, said, "Move, Miss Myggie, me darlin'; I must get at me sink." She drew the small, squeezing arms from round her neck, and rose, putting the child gently aside; "I'll wash me dishes before I go, mum; but I must make 'aste."

Mrs. Eliot caught her arm; "Katy! Not to-night? Take the stage tomorrow morning. It will get you there in a quarter of the time!"

"I'll be with 'er before the stage starts from 'ere," Katy said; and the next moment her hands, swift and steady, were in the dish pan. Ruth Eliot, despairingly wiping the cups and plates, still remonstrated. "But it's zero! Don't go!"

"If yer'll please be givin' me me pay, mum," Katy said; "it h'ain't due me till Saturday, but—"

"Of course! Of course!" Ruth said, hurrying into the sitting room for her purse. She put all the bills she had into Katy's hands—"because you may need extra money. But oh, do wait, Katy—you *can't* walk to Mercer!"

Katy, not even replying to the entreaty, pulled down her stocking, put the roll of bills against her big white leg, pulled the stocking up, and then, untying her apron, ran up the back stairs to her room. When she

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came down—as broad, almost, as she was long, for she had put on all the clothing she could fasten about herself—Ruth Eliot said, “If you *will* go, we’ll borrow Mr. Brown’s horse and sleigh.” (The Browns were the Eliots’ nearest neighbors.)

“An’ ’ow could I be gettin’ the ’orse back to Mr. Brown?” Katy objected, sharply.

“We’ll ask him to drive you to Mercer!”

“An’ ’im ’obblin with rheumatiz? ’e’d die of the frost.”

“Then I’ll go along with you, and bring it back!”

“An’ leave the children all night, alone in th’ ’ouse?” said Katy, sternly; “I wouldn’t think it of yer, mum!” But her face softened. “Yer kind to me! I won’t be forgettin’ it, Mrs. Eliot.”

Although she was actually straining forward, as if the delay was a palpable barrier, she did consent to wait while Ruth ran, in fruitless effort, down the road to another neighbor, whose horse, unhappily, had gone lame that very day. “Katy,” she entreated, when, shuddering with cold, she got back to the kitchen; “go in to Old Chester and get somebody to drive you—”

“I can’t take the time to walk there and ’unt up an animal,” Katy said. So all her mistress could do was to swathe the girl’s head, over and round the little shawl, with all the warm scarves she had, and throw a cape of her own about her shoulders, and make her put on Professor Eliot’s fur gloves. Then she opened the door, and stood on the threshold watching her for an icy moment, while the black night wind tore into the house, and Katy was swallowed up in the darkness.

CHAPTER III

SHE walked swiftly, thrusting her body forward, her head driving like a wedge into the wind, and her big hands clutching at the flapping cape. The stars were thick in the velvet blackness of a sky swept clean of clouds by the gale. The road was slippery with trodden snow and the ridges of the wheel ruts were like iron, with sifted snow between them . . . a terrible night of tumultuous cold! And she had twenty miles ahead of her. . . . Once she put her hand to her throat, fumbling with the wraps and mufflers, and managed to pull out that little locket; she stood still long enough to kiss it hard—then she pushed it down into her bosom, and, as if some wine had touched her lips, beat on into the wind; sometimes she even ran a few steps. It was the straining, staggering slipperiness of the road that held her back more than the wind. Katy had gone over that road, back and forth, ten times in these five years, so she knew how long it took to make certain distances: to the big red barn on the left, half an hour—and almost two miles; to the Jay's house, on the other side of the river, another two miles. An hour in all. But it could not be so to-night. Sometimes, hurrying and running, she cried aloud: "God, don't let her die on me—keep her alive—keep her alive!" The wind, like a great hand, pushed her back; her hobnail shoes slipped and slid; once she fell—and rose with an oath.

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As she staggered to her feet a little shadow moved in the road; it was a cat, dragging what seemed to be a crushed leg. Katy picked the little creature up; "I bet," she said, "it got into somebody's trap! Folks that sets traps is crool devils." She stood still, feeling the poor little body all over with her gentle fingers and detecting the wincing recoil of a bleeding foot; she sighed and shook her head. "I got to lug it along, I suppose," she said; "I can't leave it 'ere to freeze." She tucked the little thing into the warm curve of her arm, and started on, head down, battering her way into the wind.

On—On—On—When she reached the Jay's house she had been more nearly two hours than one, and the cat was heavy on her arm. She had sixteen miles still to go. At what she guessed was midnight she saw, with despair, that she had covered only nine miles. "Keep 'er alive," she prayed; "oh, say, You, *keep 'er alive*, and I'll put a dollar in the plate!" She was so cold that long shudders ran steadily down her back, and her hands, clutching the cloak, which was always ballooning out behind her, had lost feeling. Sometimes she had to stop to rest; then, shifting the kitten from one arm to the other, she would stand and lean against a fence or tree, her panting breath tearing the flesh in her throat. It was five o'clock when, in the darkness, she saw the straggling outskirts of Mercer, which, under ordinary circumstances, she would have reached before two o'clock. At six she stopped at a tenement house. The door was locked, and her tears gushed out as if at a last despair. But she rallied to it. Hampered by the poor cat, only one numb hand could fumble in the roadway

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for something with which to bang upon the door; she found a broken brick, caked with ice, and pounded on the panel with it, swearing and sobbing, the tears freezing on her cheeks. Some one on the second floor opened a window and shouted, "What the devil—?"

"Le' me in—le' me in! Mrs. Jones 'as me child in 'er tenement—third floor back. She's sick. Le' me in—damn yer!"

The window slammed down. Then, with language to match her own, some outraged tenant came stumbling down stairs and opened the door. Without a word Katy ran past him, up the first flight, up the second flight, to the third floor back. There she rattled the door knob, very softly:

"Mrs. Jones, mum. It's me. Clarissy's mother, mum." No answer; then she rapped once—twice. . . . "Mary Jones?" At last the woman heard, and the door was opened. "Is she—" Katy gasped; "is she—" The whispered agony was so gentle that the sick child in the next room never stirred.

The woman who boarded the little thing, and who had sent the summoning letter, broke into low reassurances. "She ain't worse. Say, mercy me! You're froze!"

"Le' me see 'er!" She pushed in, paused to put the kitten down, carefully, on a mat, then ran—the hob-nail shoes like velvet on the bare floor—and fell on her knees by the bedside of a fever-flushed little girl, who opened her eyes, smiled, said "momma," and slept again. Katy, her lips trembling, said in her calm way, "Yes, Lissy. 'Ere's momma. Go 'sleep, darlin'. Momma 'as brought yer a kitty."

Mrs. Jones, full of whispered "Lord sakes!" and

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"My goodness!" and "Ain't you 'bout dead? I bet you've froze your ears," drew her into the kitchen, and stirred the fire and put some food before her. "You needn't 'a come in such a hurry," she protested; "goodness me, I didn't mean to scare you to death! How'd you get here? *Walked?* You're crazy! No; she ain't dying'! She's sick; yes, she is; (here, drink that; it's good liquor). Yes, yes! I'll give your cat some milk! Good land, did you carry a cat, all this way? I believe you *are* crazy! Well, I'll tell you about her; the doctor didn't know but what it was something bad. But it ain't. Only, I couldn't 'tend to her and do my work. Say, you'll die yourself if you don't look out! You get into my bed, quick!"

She was a good woman, this Mrs. Jones, from Katy's own part of the world; she had helped Katy through her "trouble," and for five years had boarded the child for two dollars a week—two-thirds of Katy's wages. But she took in washing, and a sick child was taxing, so she had summoned Katy. "But my land!" she expostulated, "I didn't mean she was *dyin'*!"

"She ain't goin' to, neither," Katy said, between set teeth; "I'll tear the eyes out of yer 'ead, if yer let 'er die!"

Mrs. Jones recoiled. "It ain't me made her sick," she remonstrated. Then, timidly, "won't you get into my bed and warm you?"

Katy did not even answer. She sat down at Lissy's bedside; sometimes, with gentle, icy fingers, she tucked the covers about the child's shoulders; once she kissed the pillow near the flushed face. And all the time long, slow shivers shook her. She was not really warm again for hours. When Lissy awoke it was to

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find her mother's arms ready for her. All that day and the next she lay in Katy's soft lap, and Katy crooned, to the creak of an old rocking chair, "Lovey. Lovey. Lovey." Sometimes she stopped to pet the limping cat, and always she stroked Lissy's sunny hair, or kissed her hands and feet, and worshipped her! Once Mrs. Jones broke in upon these divine preoccupations with blunt advice:

"See here, now, Katy, you mustn't be so daft about her. Mercy me! You ain't in decent clothes—I believe you're savin' all your money for Lissy! It's plain to be seen you don't spend nothing on yourself. You ain't got even a bustle! Don't you know what the fashion is? What kind of folks do you live with, anyway?"

"My lady come from New York," Katy defended Mrs. Eliot, and Mrs. Jones was momentarily impressed; then:

"She must be a queer New Yorker to put up with your clothes! The idea of goin' round with a shawl over your head! People don't *do* that in America. . . . I told you so the last time you was here. In America, you keep your nose in the air! 'Tain't like home. Clarissy'll be laughin' at you, the first thing you know."

Katy looked up, startled. "Laughin'? At 'er momma!"

"You look like Bedlam," said Mrs. Jones; "Lissy, ain't your mother funny—not wearin' a bunnit?" Clarissa giggled; and when Mrs. Jones said, good-naturedly, "She wouldn't be seen on the street with you, Katy, with a shawl over your head!" little Lissy agreed, "No, I wouldn't."

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Katy's face fell. "It's a good warm shawl, childy; and momma can't spend money on a bunnit." When Clarissa was asleep Katy talked this and other things out with Mrs. Jones: first she said, "Make 'er a good girl, Mary; don't let 'er be tellin' wrong stories, or thievin'. 'It is a sin to steal a pin.' Me lady learned us that at the work'ouse. An' if she pulls the cat's tail, spat 'er 'ands; a crool child is something I can't stand. Lady Clarissy used to tell us God wouldn't 'ave a crool person in 'eaven. She said crool folks and liars was left outside, with a lot of barkin' dogs and worms that e't fire and bit yer. An' if Lissy's sassy, whip 'er. Yer tell 'er she's got to be 'ave pretty, because I named 'er after a grand English lady—Lady Clarissy."

"She wasn't much for looks—Lady Clarissy," Mrs. Jones ruminated; "*I* always thought she looked like a horse."

"Looks don't matter," Katy said. "She was kind. Well, I don't suppose she knew *me*—there was a lot of us work'ouse girls, and she never spoke a word to any of us, special. She just talked, Sunday afternoons—oh, grand! I never knowed what about. Except 'ell. I knowed *that*—them dogs and fire-worms! So I h'ain't never told a lie, or been crool. I wisht she knew I named Lissy for 'er."

"Say," said Mrs. Jones, suddenly, "Lissy asked me where her poppa was, and I said I guessed he was dead."

"Well, maybe 'e is," Katy said, cheerfully. Then she began to talk of Lissy's future: "She's got to 'ave schoolin'. I 'ear a lot of talk about it at our 'ouse; my master's a schoolmaster, and they think there's

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nothing like learnin'. They are 'avin Miss Marion learned; she'll know everything! Well, I'm going to 'ave Clarissy learned. That's why I don't waste the price of fashionable clothes."

"You look like—I don't know what!" Mrs. Jones objected.

"Looks don't matter," Katy said again. Then she told Mrs. Jones that as soon as Lissy could go to school and be learned to write, she must send her mother a letter once a month. "I'll put ten cents extra on 'er board, to pay yer fer the paper and a stamp. I can't write back," she added sadly, and looked at her big hand: "I wisht I was as smart as yer, Mary; but I can't get me fingers round on to the pen, some 'ow."

In those days of her child's convalescence Katy took the opportunity to do Mrs. Jones' washing and scrub the floor; and certainly the big, powerful figure, on hands and knees, did not suggest "fashionable" clothes; it suggested nothing but labor and love. And when, after supper, the labor ceased, and Katy sat basking by the stove, her stockinged feet in the oven, her child in her lap—and the cat in Lissy's lap—she suggested only love—maternal love, a thing as elemental as a plowed field, or softly falling rain! Once as she sat, placid and rosy, in the creaking rocking chair, Clarissa's little fingers caught at the shoe string, and the locket was pulled from its warm resting place; Katy, beaming, opened it, and showed the child her own baby face. "Mrs. Jones 'ad that tintype took of yer when yer was three years old," she said.

Clarissa, regarding the tintype, said, "Why didn't she have it took with a bow on my hair?"

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"Yer was too little fer bows then, Lissy," Katy said, and put the locket back into her bosom, and smothered the child's face—neck—hair—with kisses. Then she said: "I've a present fer yer." She took her flat, shabby purse from a capacious petticoat pocket, and fumbled in it for a ten-cent piece, which she fingered wistfully before putting it into Lissy's hand. "Don't spend it all at once," she said; "spend it *careful*. Momma can't give yer another dime fer a good while. Momma 'as to save money so Lissy can get learned."

A week later, trudging back to Old Chester through a drizzling February night, Katy calculated how much this maternal week had taken from her savings, and sighed. But most of the time she thought about Mrs. Eliot. "She was kind to me! I won't never forget it. And I'll tell 'er about Lissy."

Never was anybody more warmly welcomed than Katy! Mrs. Eliot, in the kitchen stirring up porridge for breakfast, looking very tired and confused; Marion, setting the table; little Maggie under everybody's feet; Professor Eliot trying to make coffee—then an outcry: "*Katy!*" and the little girls clamoring and hugging her, and the master shaking hands with her, and Mrs. Eliot—*kissing her!*

"Oh, Katy dear," Ruth said, "is your sick friend better?"

Katy, her hands on her hips, looked at the kitchen and her mistress, and shook her head: "Tzz! Tzz! Tzz!" she said. Then she took her lady gently by the shoulders: "Yer get out of 'ere quick! And after breakfast I'll put yer to bed. An' if yer please, sir, gimme that coffee pot and take the mistress away.

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Children, off with yer! We'll 'ave waffles!" Alone, nodding her head, she surveyed her domain, and sighed. "It's well I come back," she said, candidly; and went upstairs to take her things off. The next minute she was at work. The need for her to be "back" was so great that it was two or three days before the moment came for telling Mrs. Eliot. When it did, Katy was entirely matter-of-fact:

"If yer please, mum, I thought I'd be mentionin' to yer about me child."

Ruth Eliot gave a little start. "Your—*child*? I didn't know you were married, Katy."

"I h'ain't, mum. I'll show yer 'er picture." She tugged at the shoe string, then pulled it, with the dangling locket, over her head, and put the precious thing into her lady's hands. Ruth Eliot, grateful for the breathing space of examination and praise of the tintype, was saying to herself, "Not married! What *am* I going to say to her?" She hadn't an opportunity to say anything. Katy, standing respectfully, her hands folded across her waist line, her handsome, rosy face full of friendly certainties, told her about Lissy's illness—and incidentally let her know the full terror of those hours of darkness and cold. "An' I 'ad to carry a cat all the way. I found one on the road, 'urted from one of them crool traps; so I carried it along. An' when I got to Mrs. Jones, where I board 'er, me God! if the 'ouse wasn't locked! Well, I thought I'd die, mum, with rage and frost; an' I cursed real loud. An' a man 'eard me, an' 'e come down an' opened the door. An' 'e cursed, too," said Katy, cheerfully; "but I got in."

Her mistress was dumb.

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"It was Mrs. Jones that had the picture took of Lissy, and she gimme the locket fer it. 'Course, mum, I h'ain't one to buy 'andsome trinkets," Katy said, taking the ugly gilt and glass thing back into her own admiring hands, and slipping the shoe string over her head; "you know I'm not a wasteful young woman—me, with Lissy to bring up and get learned! Oh, she *was* sick," Katy said, and her chin trembled.

"But, Katy," Ruth Eliot began courageously; "it's not right, you know, to have a baby, when—when you're not married—"

"But there's no one wantin' to marry me," Katy explained, surprised.

"Your little girl's father?" Mrs. Eliot said, but Katy broke in:

"'Im? Oh, 'e wasn't one I'd marry, mum. 'E was a low sort. I wouldn't have demeaned myself to *marry* 'im. Anyway, I never knowed 'is name." Ruth's bewilderment found no words. "An' I don't care much fer marryin'," Katy said; "I've got Lissy. I named 'er, mum, after me lady at the 'all—Clarissy; Lady Clarissy. An' I'm goin' to have 'er learned; an' a man would drink me wages, an' be in the way, too. I'm makin' bold to tell yer about Lissy, mum, because yer was kind to me—lendin' me the master's gloves! An' only she was so sick I wouldn't stayed the week, an' left all the work to yer—well, yer didn't scrub," she interrupted herself, with her little grunt of a laugh, her loving, faithful eyes on Mrs. Eliot's face; "but yer shan't never touch yer sweet 'ands to the pots again. I'm goin' to take care of yer, my dearie, an' yer'll be tellin' me 'ow to get Lissy learned."

"Oh, Katy," Ruth Eliot said, the tears suddenly

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bright in her eyes; "you are the dearest thing that ever was!" She put her arms round Lissy's mother, and squeezed her. "And your little girl shall be educated! I'll help you!"

Jim Eliot, listening to his wife's rather breathless version of Katy's story, whistled.

"I'm going to have the child come and visit her once in a while," Ruth said; "and we'll speak of her now to the neighbors as 'Mrs. McGrath.' But, Jim, I don't see why, truthful as she is, she didn't tell me about her baby when she came to us?"

Her husband ruminated. "Well, silence isn't lying," he said; "Katy has all the animal virtues—and one of them is reticence. But when it comes to human virtues—virtues of the intellect—she has only got as far as not lying. She has, however, a vague idea that people sort of approve of marriage. So she thought it prudent, under the circumstances, not to mention 'Lissy'—Lissy being merely a fact in nature. Like eating and drinking."

Though Ruth had been born in New York, she protested with true Old Chester horror: "*Jim!*"

"And she wants to have her 'learned,' does she?" Professor Eliot said; then he shook his head; "she would pluck every feather out of her breast for this child! But when the pelican hatches out a lark, what happens?"

"But, my dear! You wouldn't keep the child down to Katy's level?"

"Will the child keep up to Katy's level?" he said; "well, she's bound to educate her; so it will be done. I bet on Katy."

It was a safe bet; Katy in the next few years—

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heavier, sweeter, more faithful, more truthful (if that were possible!) toiled and toiled with just one end in view: the education of Clarissa. Not but what she had time for other things. . . . Time, if Old Chester children had a party, to say, eagerly, to her lady, "Le' me make a cake fer 'em, mum?" or, "Oh, mum, our children loves ice cream! I'll make a freezer full. Washday? Oh, that's no 'arm." And she had "time," when Maggie Eliot died, to give the broken mother the healing of her own tears, and afterwards, when other people were forgetting, Katy had "time" to bring from her own heart small memories which kept the dead child a living, and even a cheerful, presence in the family; "time," when she was hanging out the wash, to take a clothespin from her mouth, and call over her shoulder from among the flapping sheets and pillow cases, "Oh, mum! See! There, beyond the tea towels: Miss Myggie's bride rose bush 'as a bud on it! Do you mind 'er planting it that May Day?" And again: "I declare, mum, if 'ere isn't the mug I gave Miss Myggie four years ago! Would yer 'ave any objection to me usin' it fer me coffee in the mornings?" Or, very gently, "See, mum, if yer' cryin' like that, yer'll scare the child. She never seen yer do so, me love; she always seen yer laughin'. So laugh fer 'er now, dearie!" Katy had "time" the winter Mrs. Van Horn died to sit up with her night after night; nobody, the sick woman said, grumpily, could lift her the way Katy did. (It is to be said that after Mrs. Van Horn died, her Joshua did give Katy a little money—but that wasn't why Katy nursed his wife: "She didn't lock the door on me!" said Katy.)

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Well! she could not—our Katy!—speak with the tongues of men and of angels, nor had she the gift of prophecy, nor did she understand all mysteries and knowledge—but because she loved Love, and rejoiced in Joy, and remembered kindnesses, the Eliots' Katy always, day and night, “had time” for other things than toil.

It is that sort of “Time,” I suppose, which is really “Eternity.”

CHAPTER IV

OLD Van Horn's small gift to Katy went right into the bank for Clarissa's "learning." By and by her mother's purpose fired the child's own ambition, and she really did very well in Mercer's public school; in a surprisingly short time she was able to write: "*Deer Momma I am in Clas 2 It rained Sunday I have a new hat With lov Lissy McGrath.*"

Katy could not read these letters, but after her lady had read them to her, she put them away in an old cigar box, and every Sunday afternoon pored over them, picking out a word here and there; "h'ain't it woonderful a little thing like 'er can write?" she used to say, proudly. Lissy's monthly reports went into the cigar box, too; Mrs. Jones sent them, for she was as ambitious for the child as was Katy herself; and she did her best to counteract Katy's unfashionableness by inculcating many things to which Lissy's mother was quite indifferent.

"But I won't let her get vain," Mary Jones promised: "I've got her learned some po'try my mother learned me, and I make 'er say it whenever she puts on her best dress:

"What, looking in the glass again?
Why is my silly child so vain?
Does she think herself as fair
As the gentle lilies air?"

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That," said good Mrs. Jones, "will keep her from vanity. But honest, Katy, between you and me, she *is* pretty!"

She really wasn't—*very*; she had round hazel eyes, like Katy's, but they were sad, not merry; and she had the same burnished brown hair; but instead of Katy's fresh, rosy plumpness, Clarissa was thin, and rather badly freckled. However, it was a good little face, and the Eliots liked her—for Ruth carried out her plan of inviting the girl to visit her mother, so they had a chance to observe, not only her looks, but her personality.

"Nice little thing," James Eliot said; "and I rather think a good mind."

"Yes; but I wish she was more demonstrative to Katy," his wife said.

"Katy is practically a stranger!" her husband reminded her.

Certainly "demonstrativeness" was all on Katy's side! While Lissy was still a child, and Mrs. Jones, in the summer vacation, sent her down to Old Chester, all spick and span, and very conscious of her "best clothes," Katy, running from the kitchen to meet the stage, hugged her almost to death the minute she arrived, and Lissy, smothered in those big arms which trembled with love, looked frightened. During the two weeks of her visit she played with Marion, was taken into Professor Eliot's study to "look at Miss Myggie's picture"; ate in the kitchen, shared her mother's room, was very polite to Katy—and somewhat afraid of her. However, except for this childish shrinking from a stranger's affection, the yearly fortnight was a happy experience to little Lissy,

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and the whole situation was simple enough. It was still simple even when she was fourteen, and Ruth Eliot said to her husband, "She says she wants to be a school teacher. That will mean she can support Katy in her old age—but Katy never thinks of *that*! Do try and get her into the Academy, Jim, as a working student."

He tried, reluctantly; and succeeded, with misgivings. "Do you think she'll really be any happier when she's crossed the *pons asinorum*?" he asked his wife. "That's a fine thing for a school master to say!" she retorted. But he only said dryly, "Perhaps it's because I'm a school master that I say it." However, as a result of his efforts Lissy, at fifteen, went to boarding school—and simplicity vanished! At first, school life was all an eager happiness to her. The Academy was, she said, "grand! Swell," she told Mrs. Jones, describing the pleasant dignities of the dining room; indeed, her appreciation of certain decorums made Jim Eliot say, "She takes to finger bowls like a duck to water!" And just in proportion as she "took to finger bowls," life ceased to be simple to her—for she remembered the Eliot kitchen! As she grew in self-consciousness she shrank from the Old Chester pupils—though it is to be said for us (little snobs as we were!—as all girls are;) that that kitchen made no difference to us; we loved Katy too much to think about her personal habits—except Lucy Hayes! She was witty about Katy's shining shawled head; but Lucy would have made fun of the Angel Gabriel! By the end of the first term Lissy was sophisticated—and ashamed. Professor Eliot felt the unhappiness of this before his wife did; and when, in midsummer,

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the child came to make that customary visit, "Will she eat with us" he said, "or with the pelican?"

"Katy will decide that," Ruth said, courageously. She really wasn't very courageous, but she spoke to Katy in the most matter-of-fact way: "Clarissa will come into the dining room with Marion, Katy."

Katy gave her an amazed look. "*Lissy?* set down along with the master?"

"But, Katy, she and Marion are school mates, and—"

"No, mum. Thank yer kindly. *Lissy* must keep 'er place."

Lissy, listening, looked at her mother, and turned very red. . . . It was August, and hot. The stage had arrived ahead of time, and Katy, crimson and perspiring, hurrying to get her kitchen to rights for her beloved guest, heard the wheels, and, dropping her scrubbing brush, ran out to the gate; even before *Lissy* could step down from the stage, Katy caught her in her arms—straining her to her breast, and kissing her loudly. In the house, she put her big hand, smelling of soapsuds and the scrubbing bucket, on the child's hair—the only very pretty thing about *Clarissa*—and said, "Oh, lovey, you do look fine!" Tears stood in her eyes.

It was then that Ruth came out to the kitchen to greet the visitor; and when she made that suggestion about the dining room, and saw the tremor that ran through the girl at Katy's honest servility, she suffered—for the lark, not for the pelican! The pelican did not need sympathy; she was one broad smile of happiness.

During that uncomfortable fortnight Mrs. Eliot

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took pains to talk to the silent child—about the weather, or the garden, or her clothes; and Lissy, with the simpering smile which Mrs. Jones had taught her was polite, said, “Yes, ma’am,” and “No, ma’am.” Professor Eliot went out to the kitchen several times, and was jocose as to Latin and algebra, and Lissy smiled—more easily—and said, “Yes, sir,” and “No, sir,” Marion, egged on by her mother, said, “Come on Clarissa! Lucy Hayes is here, and we’ll play croquet;” and Lissy, not smiling at all, said curtly, “I don’t want to.” So it was that she sat about in the spotlessly clean kitchen; saw Katy eat, with gross enjoyment, food piled on the blade of her knife, winced when she found her mother’s arms suddenly about her, and turned her face away and shut her eyes under quick smacking kisses. . . . It was at the end of the third day that she said, “It’s awful to eat with your knife.” Her little thin face twitched with disgust.

“Oh, I can’t take time to fuss things on to a fork,” Katy explained, good naturedly; and added, with her big, merry laugh, “an’ what’s a fork, anyway, but a knife split up?” Yet, proud that her girl should be so “fashionable,” she did essay a three-pronged fork, guffawing loudly at its futility in regard to peas.

It was a week later that Lissy suddenly burst out: “Why don’t you wear shoes?” Then, in a broken, panting breath, “I want to go home.”

Her mother, taking up the ashes from the range, looked around at her, open mouthed: “What’s that?” Clarissa was silent. Katy carried her ashes out to the barrel, and came back, beating her dusty hands to-

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gether; she was bewildered. "Don't yer like bein' with momma?"

Lissy said, in a strangled whisper, "I don't like it . . . here."

"Don't like it? 'ere?" Katy's rosy face puckered with her effort to understand. "What do yer want? Visitin' yer momma in a fine 'ouse, an eatin' all the food yer can cram into yer belly—an' the best of food, too, for I cook it meself!"

Clarissa didn't say what she "wanted"; she just ran upstairs to her mother's room and locked herself in. Alone, she sobbed furiously for a minute; then went over to the window and knelt down, her elbows on the sill, her quivering chin propped on her clenched hands. "I'll never come here again! I'll work in Mercer next summer, so I won't have to come. Maybe I can get a place in Dunbar's store." Out on the lawn she could see Marion and Lucy Hayes, playing the game of croquet which she had declined to join. "If Lucy sees momma's feet, I'll *die*!" She dropped her face on her arms, and trembled . . . She was only sixteen—poor little Lissy! When did sixteen ever see the loveliness of Love? But sixteen (acquainted with finger bowls!) will see the knife blade, and hear the grammar. "People will know she's my mother," the suffering child said.

The sky was deeply blue; in the west, behind the green shoulder of the hill, a glistening white cloud was piled like a great dome; below her window was the rosy fragrance of some late-blossoming shrub. Lissy, lifting her tear-stained face, looked out of the window, and for an instant Beauty made her forget the scorch of mortification in her little breast. "It's

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pretty!" she said. Then she heard the voices of the two girls, and set her teeth. "After I graduate at the Academy I'll go to that State Normal School Marion is going to. I'll be a lady. I'll be a school teacher. And I'll say mamma isn't my—" She paused. The only thing that Katy had really instilled into her child was truthfulness. Clarissa was afraid to lie. "I'll say she took care of me when I was little. *That's* true. Then people will think she stole me. Well, maybe she did? I'm not like her. Except my hair. I'll—I'll cut it off! I'll say I was named for a great English lady; that's true, too. Perhaps I'm a relation of hers? Oh, why doesn't mamma wear shoes?"

When she came down stairs that night for her supper, she was sullen with pain, but Katy, disturbed at that outburst of discontent, was overwhelmingly tender, and loaded her plate with an incredible and revolting abundance of food; after supper, still conscious of the child's inarticulate pain, she put her arms around her, saying, "What ails yer, lovey dear? Tell mamma! Mamma'll make everything right fer yer. Do yer want a finger ring, maybe? Girls is that way! I'll buy yer one fer—fer a *dollar!*" But Lissy turned her shrinking face away.

It was after this visit that James Eliot said to his wife, "Ruth, it's a tragedy! Those confounded finger bowls have got into Lissy's blood, and she looks down on Katy; a pigmy, contemptuous of Antæus! But all the same, the pigmy has more brains in its little finger than Katy has in her whole body. Did you ever hear that 'the generation which is wiser than its predecessor, is weaker'?"

"Horrid idea!" said Ruth.

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"Well, when I'm President," said Professor Eliot, "I shall make Congress pass a law that children shan't know any more than their parents; they shan't use finger bowls, so to speak—*unless* their fathers and mothers do! I told Doctor Lavendar so, and he said that would keep Marion down on our level. I had admitted that she was beginning to be mortified at my old-fashioned ways; she asked me yesterday why I didn't wear a standing collar. And I bet she thinks your voice is too loud."

"Nonsense!" said Ruth.

"Marion!" her father called into the dining room, where Marion was studying, "don't you think mamma talks rather loudly?"

Marion, in an embarrassed voice, called back, "We-ell—"

Jim Eliot shouted with laughter. "There! What did I tell you? Every child criticizes its parents, and disapproves of them. Otherwise there would be no 'progress' in the world! So, if you want 'progress'—"

But his Ruth only said again, "Nonsense!"

CHAPTER V

THE experience of that visit left a scar on Lissy's mind. Just in proportion as "finger bowls," so to speak, became part of her life, she brooded over her mother's habits. When her second summer vacation came she held to her purpose of working in a shop in Mercer. She really wanted to earn money and pay her own board, but—"anything to keep from going into that awful kitchen!" she said to herself. Katy, listening to Mrs. Eliot reading the letter in which Clarissa announced her determination to "work this summer at Dunbar's dry goods store," was proud of her purpose, but anxious about her health: "I wanted to fat 'er up, mum," said Katy: "I 'ave money enough to pay 'er board to Mary Jones!"

"She can come down for Sunday now and then," Mrs. Eliot said, kindly; "that will do her good;" and Katy beamed. It was when the first Sunday visit was imminent that she made an eager offering of love to her girl. . . . Lissy's question: "Why don't you wear shoes?" had not been answered by the retort, "I don't, because I have to buy shoes for *you*!" Even to herself, our dear Katy could not say a thing like that. But, nevertheless, as she thought it over in her slow way, the question troubled her. "Well, next time she comes," she reflected, looking at her bare feet, "I'll put on me shoes." But before she came (cringing—

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poor little Lissy! at the prospect of even two days with her mother) Katy had an inspiration; her big clumsy shoes were not like those her darling wore; she would buy a pair of buttoned boots—"like Lissy's!" Tight, pointed toed, high heeled. It was a spiritual pinnacle. So when her girl arrived, there she was, hobbling about, groaning sometimes under her breath, but enduring the pain of being in the "fashion" with the gay gallantry of Love.

"Miss Myggie'd be laughin' at me, wouldn't she mum?" she said to little Maggie's mother; "she was the sensiblest child!" Then she laughed loudly herself; "well, serves me right; shoes like that is foolishness!" She said this because she had just had an ugly fall on the cellar stairs, and Ruth had run to help her get on her feet; "I caught me 'eel on the step; but Lissy likes 'eels!" Her sweet eyes smiled, though she was holding a corner of her apron to her mouth; "I would curse if yer weren't here, mum; I've broke me tooth." She spat out some blood, and laughed again; "'tain't anything, but it will look bad."

It did!—but she forgot looks when Lissy came into the kitchen. "Momma's in style," she told the girl, triumphantly, holding out a large and suffering foot for inspection.

Clarissa said, listlessly, "Yes," then saw, behind the sunshine of Katy's smile, the ugly emptiness of the missing tooth—and frowned; she wouldn't have been young, if she had not given the shrug which Youth affects to show superiority. Marion Eliot, seeing the lifted shoulder, was angry enough to tell her father about it:

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"She isn't sweet to Katy! I'll choke her if she's nasty to Katy!"

"My dear," said her father, dryly, "would you be sweet to your mother, if she couldn't read or write—and if everybody in Old Chester knew she couldn't?"

"Of course, I would!" Marion said.

"Well," Professor Eliot said, "perhaps you would. Youth is very noble now-a-days. But, personally, I don't like to think of the strain upon my own filial piety if, in my college days, I had seen my beloved mother eat with her knife."

"But, Jim," Ruth remonstrated, "think what Katy has done for that girl!"

Her husband looked at her, amused but hopeless. Apparently his Ruth could not understand that nobody loves because love is appropriate. As for Youth, it loves (when it does; which is not often!) only because its pretty, pitiful foolishness is met by understanding and respect. Youth would not be Youth if it knew gratitude; and, of course, it never thinks of bloody feathers plucked from a pelican's brave breast; or of passionate feet hurrying over a frozen road; or of service rendered by rough hands with blackened nails. But a knife blade between kind lips will stab the love of sophisticated Youth, almost to death. . . . "It's irrational to expect Lissy to *love* Katy," James Eliot said; "but if she doesn't admire her, she ought to be choked—as Marion suggests."

With a view to encouraging admiration, or at least of lessening Lissy's obvious disrespect, Ruth Eliot tried to make Katy look a little less what she was: a peasant! strong and sound and unself-conscious as a tree. To that end she openly begged: "Mrs. Mc-

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Grath is sending her daughter through the Academy, but it means such rigid economies for her that I am trying to get some discarded clothes for Katy herself," Ruth would say. "I can't give her mine—I wear them to rags!" she explained, laughing. She was able, in this way, to get several "discarded" things, which made Katy's wardrobe truly terrible. Once she secured a bonnet—which saved buying a new shawl for Katy's burnished brown head. But there was a grave moment when the bonnet arrived, because Ruth, rather pleased with her achievement, happened to repeat what she had said of "Mrs. McGrath's" needs. Katy, standing before the mirror trying the bonnet on, turned and looked at her lady with startled eyes. "But I h'ain't, Mrs.,' mum!"

"Katy, dear, that doesn't make any difference."

Clarissa's mother stared, open-mouthed. "But, Mrs. Eliot! Don't yer know yer mustn't tell wrong stories? Why, we go to 'ell if we do that! Me lady at 'ome told me that, when I was a little thing. Promise me yer won't do it again? Why, lovey, if yer wasn't in heaven, with Miss Myggie, I wouldn't want to go there meself!"

The quick tears stood in Ruth Eliot's eyes; she had nothing to say. Who could venture to instruct such tenderness? Katy's Calvinistic God might be a devil (to the Unitarian Eliots), but such as He was, He had made Katy! Katy, who never forgot the little dead child of another woman. Ruth could only say, humbly, "I won't say it again, Katy, dear. It's no matter about the 'Mrs.'"

"Of course it h'ain't," said Katy, cheerfully; "don't give *that* a thought, mum. But—yer won't be tellin'

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wrong stories any more—if I may make bold to say so, me love?" Then she surveyed herself and her bonnet in the mirror; "It's plain like, mum, h'ain't it?" (It was, Ruth having surreptitiously removed some inappropriate flowers!) "I'm thinkin' Lissy'd like it better with a plume? She's so stylish—is Lissy! But never mind!" she added, quickly, fearful that she had seemed ungrateful; "I'll wear it as it is; and maybe, some day, I'll buy a plume:—but me shawl is more comfortable!" she insisted, with her rosy smile that showed the sacrifice of a tooth for Love.

So this was how things stood the June that Lissy, eighteen years old, and looking forward to the State Normal School in the fall, graduated from the Academy. It was a great occasion. Katy was to go to the Commencement exercises, and see the crowning of her toiling years. She and Professor and Mrs. Eliot (Marion was graduating too, so the whole family had to be on hand!) were to take the morning stage for Upper Chester. For months Katy had planned for the Day. "I'll wear that bunnit," she told Ruth; "Lissy don't like me shawl. Girls is that way; silly!—except Miss Myggie. Do yer mind the night she pinned me shawl over 'er 'ead, just to tease me?" Then she looked at Ruth: "Smile for 'er, lovey!" she said, with kind command; "but I *won't* put them strings over me ears! It h'ain't sensible; what would I be coverin' up me ears fer, when I want to 'ear every word any of the big bugs say to Lissy? I'll put 'em be'ind me ears." She faced, too, the ordeal of the buttoned boots; they had been worn only on rare and suffering occasions, so they were still shiny and squeaked loudly. The question of her dress had

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worried her, "fer I can't get me a new one, with Lissy's white frock to buy—an' ribbons fer it, and 'er clothes for next winter to get," she confided to Ruth, who, in a burst of sympathy (which she afterwards regretted) begged a dress for her—a worn black silk with green satin stripes. When Katy, beaming, tried it on, Ruth—seeing what she had done—was in despair. "Oh," she thought, "why *did* I do it?"

She said something like this to her husband, while they waited at the gate for the stage, and Katy, who had grown rather fat in the last few years, came teetering down the path in her sad shoes, to stand respectfully behind them, her face shining with soap and happiness. Katy, at forty-two, was really very pretty; not even her "fashionable" clothes could dim the brightness of that English complexion, and the shine of the laughing hazel eyes, and the gleam of the burnished hair. But Ruth, turning to smile at her, said, under her breath, "Oh, good *heavens!*" for, without taking her lady into her confidence, Katy, to honor Lissy, had bought in the village the plume for which she secretly longed, and added it—a pert purple cheapness—to the sober bonnet, the strings of which pushed her ears forward in a truly "sensible" way. As a further adornment, the old gilt locket with Lissy's picture in it, had been pulled from the warm shelter of her heart, and was displayed, on a new shoe string, upon her breast; and she had pinned up the silk skirt in scallops all round the hem—the ugly fashion of a few years before. Ruth, seeing these indignities to simplicity, was ready to cry. "Where *did* she get that feather?" poor Ruth thought; "she

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would have been sweet in her new calico and her little shawl!"

Professor Eliot, putting on his glasses and looking down the road so that he need not look at Katy, said, "It *is* ridiculous, dear, but sublime! But—poor Lissy!"

Katy, thinking he was concerned at the lateness of the stage, said reassuringly, "It'll be comin' in a minute, sir. An' Lissy'll be at the door lookin' fer us! My, h'ain't it 'ot!"

When the coach arrived, and they went jogging along the dusty road in the blazing sunshine, to Upper Chester, Katy, on the front seat, tried to conceal her own fear that they might be late. "Lissy may think I h'ain't comin'," she said anxiously to Silas, who had driven our stage for fifty years; "she'll be worryin'! Can't yer 'urry them 'orses? No—don't whip 'em. That would be crool."

They were not late, although Mary Jones had arrived from Mercer before them, in her best dress,—all ruffles, ribbons, bustle! and in black kid gloves which, before the day was done, would whiten in the palms and split across the backs of her perspiring hands. Also, she had a pink fan, with mother-of-pearl sticks, which she used incessantly—sometimes with fashionable languor, sometimes with agitated swiftness. She was waiting for Lissy's mother at the entrance of the Academy. "Me God!" said Katy, looking at her with awed eyes, "h'ain't yer stylish!" Mrs. Jones was as excited as Katy herself. "I thought Lissy'd be at the gate to meet us," she said, "but she ain't. I guess she's at her books. . . . Katy, ain't you got any kid gloves? An' say, I d'know as

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I like that skirt on you? Ain't you kind o' fleshy for it?"

Katy had a moment of dismay, but forgot it when she and Mary Jones walked up the aisle of the chapel with Mrs. Eliot. During the exercises, when Lissy read her essay on "The Future," Ruth caught the big faithful hand and squeezed it, and whispered, "Katy, dear, she's wonderful!"

"Yes!" Katy whispered back; "oh, Mrs. Eliot, 'ow learn'd she is—I can't understand a word she says! Think o' them little letters she used to send me—and now, why, it's like she was readin' a newspaper! Oh, Mary Jones, don't I wish me lady could know she's named after 'er! It would be a proud day fer me lady." Katy wept. And while she wept, Professor Eliot, on the platform watching Lissy—thin, sad, intelligent—coming up for her diploma in the white dress Katy had managed, somehow, to buy for her, said to himself, "Yes; 'learnéd enough to roast an egg,' I've no doubt!" But a minute later, he added, "Poor child!—poor child!"

Afterward, when the girls, like a flock of pigeons, went fluttering about, talking to proud parents, Lissy, very pale, came to speak to Mrs. Eliot, then turned to her mother, put out her hand, and began, "How do you—" But Katy's arms were about her, and the "do" was smothered against her bosom. "Lovey dear—lovey dear!"

"Oh—" Clarissa said, in an agonized whisper, "*don't.*" She pushed the encircling arms aside, and ran, panting, across the lawn to join some of the other girls, one of whom (of course she wasn't an Old Chester girl, or she wouldn't have asked the question)

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said, "Who's your friend with the purple feather, Clary?"

"That's Mrs. Jones," Lissy said, faintly; "she—she was my nurse."

"No, I meant the fat one, who wept over you—*did* you see her 'diamond' locket?—on a shoe string!"

There was a second's pause—then Lissy said, "She's a—friend of Mrs. Jones."

Marion, hearing this truthful lie, gave her one look; then turned on her heel and darted back to Katy, standing in the throng with Mrs. Jones, in all the unconscious isolation of her personality. Mary Jones was not unconscious of the isolation; fanning herself violently, she welcomed Marion with the angry and mincing effusiveness of one who wants attention; but Marion didn't notice her. She put an arm around Katy, and said hotly, "Come! We'll go and speak to Lissy!"

But Katy shook her head. "No, no! She's with the big bugs. Ladies and gentlemen. I wouldn't be mixin' in, me dear. An' I can't walk; me shoes is killin' me. Mrs. Jones and me just like to look at 'er. Say, now, Mary Jones, hain't it woonderful?"

"Yes," Mrs. Jones said, anxiously; "but she hadn't ought to have two-buttoned gloves. The other girls has got three-buttoned; suppose they *did* cost fifty cents more! Either you or me would 'a give it to her! Say, Katy, let's go over and talk to her?"

But Katy had no desire to talk to Lissy; "I know me place," she said, simply. Lissy must have known her "place," too, for she did not leave the "ladies and gentlemen" until the exercises were over and the

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stage was waiting ; then she sought Katy out, and said, briefly, "Oh, are you going? Good-by."

In the stage, on the way home with the Eliots, Katy was very silent. "She didn't like me skirt," she was thinking. She was not in the least hurt ; she was only sorry to have disappointed Lissy. "Maybe it wasn't fashionable enough. I'm glad I didn't walk around with 'er. She'd 'a been eneasy about it. Girls is that way." Then furtively in the darkness of the stage, she took off her shoes, and sighed with relief.

The Eliots had their opinion of Lissy's behavior, but they could not express it in the stage ; in Professor Eliot's study, however, Marion burst out : "Mother ! She *denied* Katy !"

"Well," Jim Eliot said, sadly, "I've been afraid for a good while that before we saw the end of this business, we would hear the cock crow twice."

"She thinks that vulgar Jones woman is better than Katy !" Marion said.

"Katy is certainly not 'vulgar,' " her father agreed ; "vulgarity is pretense, and Katy is as incapable of pretense as a cow ! However, I suppose, Marion, that when you graduate, at the State Normal, and mamma and I come to Commencement, and I am in shirt sleeves and suspenders, and mamma has a purple feather in her 'bunnit,' you'll yearn to introduce us to your Class?" But when he and his wife were alone, he sighed : "Ruth, if Lissy had been left in Mrs. Jones's social circle this kind of thing wouldn't have happened. I have uncomfortable moments of wishing I had never put my finger into the pie!"

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It was not only Katy and the Eliots who reflected upon Lissy's behavior: going back to Mercer after the festivities, Mary Jones had something to say about it: "I don't think much of that Eliot girl's clothes; but your momma's clothes is something dreadful! That purple feather was pointin' every which way! I don't wonder you kep' away from her! I didn't like to be seen with her myself. I kep' sayin' to her, 'Keep your nose in the air! You're as good as they are!' An' what do you suppose she said? 'No, I ain't,' she says. An' the way she acts! No lady'd do it. When they give us our tea they didn't give Katy a spoon, an' if you'll believe me, she just put her finger in the cup and stirred it up!"

Lissy gasped.

"*Can't* you make 'er more of a lady?" Mrs. Jones said, in such friendly despair that she forgot her acquired h's—"I like your mother, Lissy. Mercy me! I've known 'er ever since we was girls at 'ome—though 'course she wasn't in my walk of life—*my* father was a bricklayer. But I knowed 'er, and was kind to 'er; but honest, Lissy, I declare I wouldn't like to walk the street with 'er! If she's goin' to look the way she does, she'd better 'ave stayed at 'ome in England, and not 'ave tried to better 'erself over 'ere."

There was another comment upon what Lissy had done—her own. Alone that night, in her little closet of a room in Mary Jones's hot tenement, smothering her thin flushed face in her pillow, Lissy summed up the day: "What could I do? The girls would have known she was my mother. . . . If they'd heard Mrs. Jones's grammar, they would just have thought, 'Oh,

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she was Clary's nurse.' But mamma—" After a while, exhausted with crying, she said to herself, "some day I'll pay her back all the money she's spent on me."

"Pay back!" Well, perhaps physical coarseness in one generation is transmuted to spiritual coarseness in the next generation; but, as Professor Eliot once remarked, "If I had to choose, I know which kind I'd rather live with!"

CHAPTER VI

THAT summer Clarissa's Old Chester "visitation," as Ruth Eliot called it, was a climax of misery for everybody but Katy. It began badly. . . . In those days shops did not give vacations, so Lissy, who had a summer job as bookkeeper at Dunbar's "Grand Dry Goods Emporium" in Mercer, could, to her great satisfaction, spend only one Sunday with her mother. She came on Saturday afternoon, and in the stage with her was a gentleman, and a rather dressy lady, who were coming, as Clarissa realized when she heard the directions to the stage driver, to the Eliots. But when old Silas called out, "Your jumping off place, Mister," and added, "Hey, Lissy, you gettin' out, ain't you?" Clarissa said, "No, I—I'm going into Old Chester." Behind the welcoming Eliots at the gate, she had caught sight of her mother, standing on the kitchen doorstep at the back of the house, barefooted and handsome, and laughing with joy. "Oh," she said to herself, "they would see her hug me! I won't get out."

The stage trundled on, and Katy, retreating to her kitchen, said, disconsolately to Marion, who had come to speak to her on some domestic matter, "She h'ain't come."

"Oh, yes! She was in the stage," Marion said; "but she went on into Old Chester. Perhaps she wanted to see some one."

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Katy instantly cheered up, and when her darling, in the August dusk, slipped furtively into the kitchen, she was so happy that she never asked why she had gone into the village. "We 'ave grand New York company," Katy said, her eyes caressing the silent girl; "a lady and gentleman's come fer Sunday; yer can get a peek at 'em when I go into the dining room with the peaches."

"They were in the stage," Clarissa said, briefly; "I don't care to look at them."

This was the cold beginning of poor Lissy's visit. The next unfortunate thing was all Marion's fault. She told her father about it afterward, with contrition. "I got Lissy into the mess," Marion confessed. It seems that, like most Old Chester households, the ladies of the Eliot family went, after dinner on Sunday, to lie down and read (it was understood) *religious* books—as long as they could keep awake! But this customary pious somnolence never appealed to Marion, so she sat by her window with a novel. Well, looking up from her book, she caught a glimpse down the road of that awful little Lucy Hayes, who was evidently coming to call; none of us Old Chester girls really liked Lucy—she was so flirtatious, and so much better looking than the rest of us. "And she is a horrid fibber," Marion explained to her father. "I saw her coming, and I ran out into the hall and called down the back stairs to Lissy (I knew that for once she was in the kitchen with Katy), and I said, 'Oh, Lissy, be an angel, and tell Lucy Hayes I'm 'not at home!'"

"My dear, I'm afraid you're a 'reg'lar New Yorker,' like your mother," Jim Eliot said, chuckling; and cer-

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tainly this social phrase had never been heard in Old Chester! (*I* always thought Marion Eliot, who had visited her mother's relations in New York, was putting on airs when she used it.)

"Well, anyway," Marion went on, "Lissy said she would; and she went to the front door and got rid of Lucy—which was all I wanted; but, oh, father, Katy heard her, and she was perfectly *awful*!" Marion said soberly.

"Well," said Professor Eliot.

"She just flew at Lissy for telling a lie; and she said, 'do you want to go to 'ell?—and me workin' me fingers off to get you learned?' Lissy just curled up! Oh, father, poor Lissy! Generally she makes me furious, because she sort of looks down on Katy; but now I'm sorry for her."

"I've always been sorry for her," James Eliot said: "but it strikes me, Marion, that *you*—"

"Oh, yes; of course; I was the one to go to hell. So I rushed down stairs and said it was my fib, not Lissy's."

"And then?"

"Well, Katy was very stern with me, too. She said it was crool to send that nice young lady away, coming so friendly all this distance this 'ot day to visit me. And then she said the same old thing, that if you told a lie you wouldn't get into heaven, and you stayed outside, in 'ell, with 'barkin' dogs.' Oh, how that used to scare Maggie and me! Of course I tried to explain to her just what 'not at home' meant," Marion said, looking very worldly; "but she couldn't possibly understand. As for Lissy, she was just *killed* with shame! She said, 'Oh, the company

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will hear you! *Don't!*" I must say I was afraid they would myself; Katy's voice was—was perfectly dreadful! And she said 'damn.'"

"Well," Jim Eliot said, "I believe the word is not unknown in New York. And, Marion, if your mother saw you on the edge of what she believed to be a precipice, even if it wasn't, wouldn't her voice be somewhat raucous in telling you to step back? And I'm sure I'd say 'damn!'"

Marion laughed, then sighed. "Dear old Katy! But I *am* sorry for Lissy."

Perhaps because Lissy felt the unspoken sympathy, she suffered less from this experience than Marion supposed. Her thin, sensitive young face had blazed with mortification under what she called to herself the "tongue lashing," but she felt that at least Marion saw that she, Lissy, was not vulgar! She felt sick when the outburst was over, and went upstairs to lie on her mother's bed, and count the hours until she could start for Mercer, and the shop, and Mrs. Jones—who, in spite of her grammar, at least knew how to eat, and dress, and was, in fact, "refined." When she came silently down to supper, Katy was all tenderness again. She had reproved her two beloved girls—Marion was only a little less dear to her than Lissy—and, her duty done, the tempest of wrath passed, and her smile was perfect sunshine. She made waffles for their supper, and gave Lissy a quarter. "An' yer'll remember, darlin'," she said, her big, loving hand on Clarissa's head, "never, never to tell a wrong story? What would I be doin' if yer went to 'ell? Why, I'd 'ave to go, too, to take care of yer! Promise me yer won't?"

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Lissy, moving her head away from under the caressing hand, said, briefly, "Yes," She was tingling with disgust and scorn, and would not touch her pile of waffles, soaked with fresh butter, and covered with cinnamon and sugar. Marion, however, came running gayly out to the kitchen after supper, to fling her arms around Katy, and say, "Katy, will you make waffles for me in heaven if I'll promise not to fib any more?"

"Indeed then I will, Miss Marion," Katy said, beaming, and giving her a great, soft hug.

"But I shall leave word with St. Peter that I'm 'not at home' to Lucy Hayes," Marion teased her.

Katy, seeing that a joke was intended, laughed loudly; but Clarissa did not even smile. "Marion loves her," she thought, cynically, "*because she isn't her mother.*" She would have gone upstairs to the refuge of her bedroom, but Katy said, gently, "We'll be goin' to church this even', lovey." She had reproved her child; but she was anxious, and her own responsibility weighed upon her. "I believe Mary Jones h'ain't took 'er to church enough, or she wouldn't 'a told that wrong story. I must tell Mary to get 'er a new 'at, then she'll be teasin' to go every Sunday! Girls is that way. An' Mrs. Eliot must be seein' to Miss Marion. . . . Come on along, lovey," she said.

When, in the quiet dusk, she and her girl started for prayer meeting, Clarissa walked in her usual silence; in the chapel, during the hour on the hard settees, she glanced once or twice at the serene and clumsy Madonna at her side. "That bonnet," she thought, despairingly, "is worse than her shawl!"

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(This is probably the point where Lissy's taste began to awaken.)

As they walked home, Clarissa still silent, Katy talked much in honest boastfulness of her "savings." A sense of money, apart from its uses, had gradually developed in her, and she made no secret of her enormous satisfaction in her bank account. "It's getting on to four hundred dollars!" she said, proudly.

Clarissa, listening, gave a little shrug in the darkness; four *hundred* dollars? Why, she knew people in Mercer who had four thousand dollars!

It was then that Katy suddenly changed the subject: "Why did yer go into Old Chester last night, dearie? I was waitin' fer yer at the kitchen door, an' I was afraid yer 'ad got stopped from comin'."

"Oh, I just—thought I would."

"Yer 'aven't got a feller there, 'ave yer?" Katy said, in quick anxiety.

"Of course not!"

"I 'ad to ask yer, dear, because yer must be careful about the boys," Katy said gravely; "yer' so innocent, lovey, that momma must tell yer: 'ave nothin' to do with the boys, me dear."

Clarissa was dumb with anger.

"But what did yer go fer?" Katy persisted, with cheerful curiosity.

"Well," said Lissy, still stinging from the humiliating admonition, "if you want to know: I didn't care to have those people see me . . . going into the Eliots' kitchen."

Katy stood still in the darkness, and peered at her daughter, open mouthed. "Didn't want our company to see yer? An' what business would it be of theirs—

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them, a visitin' lady and gentleman, an' yer' comin' to see yer' momma?"

Clarissa was silent.

"An' where would they find a nicer kitchen than ours? *I'm* not ashamed of it!" Katy said, a little indignation in her voice; "we got a new oily cloth last month."

"It isn't the kitchen," Lissy said. Then she gripped her hands hard together, and the words broke out: "It's—you."

"*Me?*"

"You look like—I don't know what!" Lissy said.

Kate was silent.

"Why can't you dress better?" Lissy demanded: "that bonnet is—hideous!" Her voice broke and choked. "Mrs. Jones dresses like a lady; why don't you?"

"Because," Katy said, with dignity, "I h'ain't a lady. An' neither is Mary Jones."

They had begun to walk on now, Lissy a little in advance of her mother. She had not meant to say this; a moment before the words had rushed from her lips, nothing had been further from her mind than to speak the truth. Now, it seemed as if she could not hold the truth back: "Oh, I am ashamed of you! Why do you look the way you do? And you eat so—awfully!" She sobbed aloud.

Again Katy stood still; she even gasped, and put her hand up to her head; she was a little dizzy. She wanted to speak, to explain, to say that she couldn't have clothes like Mary Jones because Lissy had to go to school. She opened and closed her lips, but no sound came. In her mind she was saying,

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"Ashamed? Why, I bought that plume fer the bunnit, just to please 'er, and be in the fashion!" She swallowed hard; "an' I *do* use me fork—when I think of it." Then she called to Lissy, almost out of sight now in the darkness: "Don't be walkin' so fast, dearie. Momma can't keep up with yer."

They neither of them spoke until they were at home again. Upstairs in Katy's room they undressed in silence. In bed, lying side by side in the dark, the daughter, wide eyed, saw the night through; Katy slept heavily, and snored. But before she slept she felt Lissy's remorseful yet shrinking hand creep about her big soft neck, and fumble across the old shoe string. "'Night, momma," the girl said; and Katy, turning over, caught her in her arms and kissed her hard, tears of relief gushing over her face. "She didn't mean it!" she told herself; "she h'ain't ashamed of me! She just didn't understand me clothes is the way they is, because I 'ad to get 'er learned. . . . I wonder would would she like a gold bracelet? I believe I'll get 'er one! Well, I'll 'ave to pay out 'alf a dollar; but if she's got a longin' fer it, I'll see she 'as it."

It was after that that she slept in snoring peace. But Lissy lay awake, rigid with misery and disgust. The next morning she ran half way up the back stairs to hide, when she heard "our company" coming out to the kitchen to leave what Jim Eliot always called "the token of esteem" in Katy's cheerfully expectant hand. But when the moment arrived for the departure of all the visitors—those of the parlor and kitchen alike!—Katy did not, as usual, go out to the stage with Lissy. She said good-by in the house, then

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watched her from the window going down the path. She saw Professor Eliot say something to his guests; saw the lady smile and put out her hand to Lissy; saw the gentleman lift his hat to her; saw him help her into the stage; saw Lissy give a little bow—"just like Miss Marion would do! Me God," said Katy, whitening, "*she's a lady.*" . . . She sat down, breathing heavily.

Later, when Ruth Eliot came out to the kitchen for the Monday morning planning of food, she found Katy very pale, and all mixed up about preserving kettles, and the amount of sugar for peach butter. When, laughing, Mrs. Eliot straightened things out, Katy laughed a little, too; but she wiped her eyes.

"Oh, mum," she said, "I'll tell yer what's the matter with me; it h'ain't that I've forgot about the sugar; but it just come over me: *Lissy's a lady.*" She spoke with a gasp; the pallor in her face made it curiously refined, even exalted. "Mrs. Eliot, mum, I never dreamed of such a thing! H'ain't it woonderful? My Lissy—a lady! Well, I'm glad I got money in the bank, and can give 'er things proper fer 'er station. A bracelet, maybe, an' a finger ring. But, oh, mum, what about me? I shame 'er! I must begin right now, and eat fashionable. An' I *ought* to git me a new bunnit; she thinks mine h'ain't in style; but Mrs. Eliot, mum, I paid fifty cents fer that plume! But Lissy said it was—I mean, she said it wasn't—'and-some. She felt bad about it. Girls is that way. But how can I buy finery for meself, with seventy-five dollars to pay out fer her, in September? If I got clothes like Mary Jones, to keep Lissy from bein' ashamed of me, what would 'appen to me savin's—that's to put 'er through the college?"

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"She never would be ashamed of you!" Ruth said, indignantly.

Kate looked at her in mild surprise. "Why, yes mum; she would—she's a lady. She'd *ought* to be ashamed—else she'd be knowin' no different 'erself. Don't yer see?"

CHAPTER VII

CLARISSA did not see her mother again before she went in September to a Normal School in the eastern part of the State. She wrote to Katy, telling her that she had been able to save, out of her wages as bookkeeper at the "Emporium," such and such a sum over and above what she had paid Mrs. Jones for board, so that now she need only ask her mother for half of her railroad fare to Ebbenstown.

It was a more than usually cold letter. In the weeks before she started upon her glorious adventure of the higher education, that miserable last visit to the Eliots' kitchen was constantly in her mind—and her mother's vulgar question about a "feller," and her servility to her betters, and her rough warning about hell. The respectful, almost awed, way in which Katy had said that Lissy might "peek at our company," was an unforgettable humiliation; "as if," Clarissa thought, posting her ledger in a little glass and iron cage in the back of the Emporium, "as if they were any better than anybody else!" It was the true American rage, which resents the possibility of there being any "betters!" Lissy felt her very ears burn with anger. Yet, in spite of her anger, she was vaguely ashamed; again she told herself, "When I graduate, and begin to teach, I'll pay back every dollar she's spent on me!" As her pen entered many "dollars" in her ledger,

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her mind was saying, hotly, "Thank Heaven, I won't have to go to Old Chester for almost a year!" (Katy had agreed that there was to be no return to Mercer for short vacations—nobody had money to waste on traveling!)

"But I suppose I'll have to see her next summer . . . 9.50 . . . 6.00 . . . 15.80 . . . No. Maybe I can find some work in Ebbenstown. I'll try to . . . 1.50 . . . 7.90 . . . 9.40 . . . Well, anyhow, I'll not have to see her eat for ten months!" More charges for hats—stockings—dresses—just such things as Katy had toiled for eighteen years to provide her darling—things which might have equaled (had they been entered on that page in the ledger) such and such a total in dollars. But in some invisible ledger in Lissy's mind were other entries: a missing tooth, broken nails, gross physical habits—entries of ugliness equaling such and such a total of unendurable mortification. There were no entries, anywhere, of tears and sweat and toil, for love's sake; things which added up, equaled the total of a baby's board, a girl's education, a woman's life of opportunity and joy. . . .

It was with a sense of flight and escape that, in September, Katy's child went, as did Marion Eliot, to the State Normal School, where, as Katy said, she was to be "learned to be a lady teacher." During the next three years she did not have to see her mother, for she found some employment in Ebbens-town during the summer vacations. She wrote bleak letters to Katy, who listened to them from Mrs. Eliot's lips in silent ecstasy. Her letters to Mrs. Jones (which were passed on to Katy) were more intimate but rather condescending. In the last year Lissy had

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come near enough to an understanding of refinement to feel the vulgarity of pretense, so she found Mrs. Jones—once so infinitely her mother's superior—less completely satisfactory. Mrs. Jones's grammar offended her, and the imitation lace and the loud-smelling toilet soaps made her uneasy. Yet (though she could not feel Katy's spiritual beauty) Lissy did remember the eighteen years of friendly instruction as to style and politeness, and she knew that all those pretentious aspirations for her, marked the peak of Mrs. Jones's aspirations for herself. So, in writing to her, Lissy was not cold—merely patronizing. When she was in the twenties—a frail rather sad-looking girl, "wiser and weaker" than her mother—she was not only what we call "educated," she was also intelligent—a not too frequent result of our methods of teaching the Youth of our beloved land! But Clarissa was really scholarly. Marion, in her letters to her father and mother, said, frankly, that she was far ahead of *her*! When Ruth read this cheerful confession to Lissy's mother, poor Katy was torn between pride for one girl, and loud defense of the other: "Miss Marion is as smart as any of 'em!"—which was a mistake of loyalty, for later Marion's diploma trembled in the balance.

In Clarissa's third year, however, Katy had some anxious moments. In a merry letter from Marion to Professor Eliot came some wonderful news: "A young man—Dick Wood—is making eyes at Lissy. He's quite nice, and his family are the swells of the place, because ever so long ago the father 'struck oil.' The mother makes me think of Katy's friend, Mrs. Jones; but she's rich, so she's worse. Lissy and I met

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him at a reception at the President's house—and he's gone on Lissy—who doesn't seem *quite* stony-hearted."

This cryptic phrase, translated to Katy (other phrases being judiciously omitted), brought an anxious look into her placid face. "Do yer think, mum," she said, "'e's Lissy's feller?"

"Well," Ruth said, much amused, "it looks that way, Katy."

Katy shook her head; "Oh, mum, I wisht I'd got learned to write!"

"Why, I'll write all you want to say to Lissy," Ruth said, surprised.

But Katy shook her head, and went back to her kitchen in silence. It was a week before she came to the point of telling Mrs. Eliot what was in her mind. "I '*ave* to ask yer to write it," she said a little sadly; "because I've got to be tellin' 'er she must be careful, mum, if she 'as a feller. She's that innocent—she must be careful. If yer please to write it out, mum."

Ruth, startled at the candor of such maternal solicitude, remonstrated. "Why, Katy, I have no doubt, from what Marion says, that Mr. Wood is a fine young man, and if he and Lissy have fallen in love—"

"Mrs. Eliot," Katy said, "if I may make bold to say so, yer don't understand young women in our station; neither did Lady Clarissy. She talked lovely about 'ell—real elegant! But she didn't know—" Katy looked at her lady, and smiled, a little humorously; "an' neither do yer, me love—the way things come to us. Kind o' car'less. Maybe if me lady 'ad talked *that*, to us . . . Well, never mind! She did

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fine with 'ell—I h'ain't ever told a lie. But I want yer to tell Lissy that Miss Marion 'as let on to us that she 'as a feller; then write it out; she must be careful. Tell 'er, momma knows, because—momma wasn't never married."

"Oh, but Katy!" Ruth protested, horrified.

Clarissa's mother made a noble gesture. "Stop, Mrs. Eliot, mum; Lissy's feller is a gentleman, but oh, mum, there's lots of gentlemen that is men! An' so yer'll be tellin' Lissy. Yer know, mum, when I was lettin' on to yer, first, about me 'avin' a child, I was kind o' simple. Do yer mind 'ow simple I was? I didn't care—*then*. Most of us work'ouse girls 'ad their babies. But livin' with yer, I got learned. Oh, I've cried, mum, in me bed at night, for fear Miss Myggie'd be knowin' about me—she up in 'eaven, lookin' into me 'eart! Or, if she wasn't knowin' now, when I got to 'eaven (and I *will* get there) I'd 'ave to let on to 'er—'ow I'd acted bad. Oh, mum, I've wept, thinkin' of that child, and then thinkin' shame of meself. So I made up me mind that if Lissy ever got a feller, I'd tell 'er '*Be careful*.' So, if yer please, mum, say: 'Momma is warnin' yer; momma wasn't married.'"

Before such dignity Ruth Eliot was helpless. She wrote to Lissy with great simplicity, and quoted Katy's words. She added that Katy's tenderness and love seemed to her completely beautiful; as for the fact: "I need not tell you," Ruth wrote, "that your dear mother is as good a woman as ever lived; when you were born, she was an innocent, ignorant child; it is part of that divine childlikeness that makes her now offer this pitiful sacrifice to you. That you and

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I believe it to be unnecessary does not lessen its nobility." Then Ruth Eliot broke into entreaty: "Oh, Lissy, be sweet to her; tell her it doesn't matter! I love your mother; her love for my little girl who died is one of the most precious things in my life. Tell her that you love her!"

This letter came, as letters often do, at the wrong moment. Lissy, as Marion had discerned, was not indifferent to the "quite nice" young man; on the contrary, he had brought into her poor little heart—which was growing so arid under the parching, withering winds of mortification—a gush of the dewy freshness of love. He really was an attractive youngster (the oil wells were sufficiently remote to make him only rather consciously "refined"); but just why he fell in love with Lissy—sad, shrinking, silent Lissy—nobody knows. Perhaps it was the sadness, and shyness, and silence. Certainly, he was none of these things himself! He was entirely self-assured, and cheerful with the loud consciousness of success. Lissy's soft hazel eyes, coupled with what he called her "tall talk" about books, religion, philosophy (Youth's usual effervescence, so impressive to listening Youth!) had made young Wood say, the very first time he saw her, "*I'm going to marry that girl.*" When he confided his intention to Lissy herself she could not speak for a minute or two.

It was in the spring vacation; all of the girls who could afford it had gone home for the holidays. Marion, when she left for Old Chester, had dropped a teasing word: "I'm going to tell your mother to begin to make the wedding cake, Lissy." Clarissa blushed, and said "Nonsense!"—but the silly words

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made her happy; "but if he asks me of course I'll say 'No,'" she told herself, grimly. Then he came, with his shining new buggy ("buggy riding" was the way young men wooed in the seventies), and with his shining bay mare, and with his shining laughing eyes; and they were hardly out of sight of houses before, on a quiet country road, he put an impetuous arm round her, drove with one hand, and "asked" her.

"Lissy," he said, "I loved you the first minute I saw you! You've got to marry me. *Please*, Lissy!"

At first she said she wouldn't, and then she said she couldn't, and then she said, "It's out of the question."

"Why is it out of the question?"

"Because I—we are—I mean I am—as poor as can be, and—"

He shouted with laughter: "Did you think I was marrying you for your money? You darling! the Wood family isn't bound for the poorhouse! You write home and tell *your* family they're invited to the wedding the day you graduate."

"I haven't any family," she said.

"All over in England, I suppose?" he said—she had told him she was English.

She said she didn't know—she supposed so. "I know I was named for Lady Clarissa Shotwell," she said (the satisfaction of saying that made the color come into her face).

He said, "'Lady Clarissa!' Mother'll be at your feet. An aristocratic daughter-in-law—"

"Oh, but I'm not aristocratic!" she said, distractedly.

"It's all the same to me" he assured her. "Mother's

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the only snob in our family. Say, 'yes,' Lissy—say 'yes,' you darling!"

"Please, *please*, stop," she said, her face twitching with pain; "I can't marry you. It isn't just that I'm poor; but I—your father and mother are—fine people, and I'm just—I mean my relations are . . . not like yours."

"Thank God!" young Richard said: "I'd be glad to see all my uncles hanged. They have half our stock, and are nuisances at stockholders' meetings. And two of them are as common as mud! You should hear their grammar. My youngest uncle isn't so bad—he's been to college. But the other two—*oh*, Lord! Mother has a fit when they visit us, for fear any of the professors' wives will call. That's why I say your 'Lady Clarissa' will warm the cockles of her heart."

Clarissa did not laugh, as he meant her to. "I was only named after that English lady; she isn't any relation—at least, I never heard that she was. And my mother is—is—" Her throat contracted with the effort to tear some sort of truth out of her pounding, sinking heart; "my mother is very plain. She is a . . . housekeeper."

"Well," the young man said (with a quick, uncomfortable recollection of the "snob," "I won't tell her!" he thought). "What difference does that make?" he said, boldly.

"She isn't—highly educated," Lissy said, very low.

"What do I care! Lissy! Listen: do you love me?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"Hold on! That's all I wanted to know. We'll be married on the twenty-third of June! That's Com-

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mencement, isn't it? Well, we'll 'commence'—you and I!" ("Mother can go to thunder!" he thought.) "As you haven't any family in Old Chester, we'll be married here," he told her; "of course, your mother'll come on for the wedding!" Then he broke into eager lovmaking, "Say 'yes,' Lissy, you darling!"

Well, she finally said it. I suppose she saw in his love a haven of refuge from Mary Jones's tenement . . . and the Eliots' kitchen! But also, she loved him; and there really was, through this whole experience, an anguished desire on her part to be honest with him. So she *tried* to tell him about Katy; but her terror at the possibility of losing him was greater than her honesty, so she told the truth—that her mother was "plain"—but she did not say how "plain." "I needn't tell him how she—acts. And he need never see her!" Her mind galloped ahead to discover ways to prevent his seeing her; reasons for never going to Old Chester with him; reasons for never asking Katy to come to Ebbenstown! She even juggled with her conscience (and that fear of untruth instilled into her by her mother) by saying, "It would be unkind to her to tell him about her grammar, and her manners." So, even while she was listening to his outpourings she was thinking, "I'm sure I can manage it so that they'll never meet!" . . . However, all that tragic futility of cowardice is Lissy's story. This is only the story of the Eliots' Katy. . . .

The warning letter Katy had dictated reached Lissy the very day that she said "yes." When she read it, she was so angry, that Ruth Eliot's plea that she should love and honor the Love and Honor of Katy's soul made not the slightest impression upon her. It was

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all an overwhelming dismay of shame. "Oh, I won't tell him *that!* I won't let him know she was—bad. I won't—I can't!" She was so crushed by the confession in Katy's warning words that the warning itself, which she called an "insult," became only another repulsive thing about her mother. She did not answer the letter for a week. When she did, she made no illusion to the "warning." She wrote to Mrs. Eliot direct; she asked her to say to Katy that she "expected to marry Mr. Richard Wood on the twenty-third of June. Please tell mother. . . ." Here she paused, shivering; "if she says she will come to the wedding, I—I won't marry him," she thought; the mere idea was horror! "Tell mother," she wrote, in frantic effort to protect herself, "that, of course, she musn't *think* of coming on; the journey would be too expensive."

The reading of that letter to Katy was an experience Ruth Eliot never forgot. She was, of course, deeply displeased at Lissy, but she was also frightened, because of the pain that she must inflict upon Katy. . . . There was no pain at all! As Ruth read, doing her best to put warmth into the frigid words, Katy turned white with joy. She could not speak; she stood clutching at the kitchen table, just as she had stood that night when she had listened to that other letter which had made her run madly out into the zero darkness.

"Married?" she said; "Lissy! And to a *gentleman?* Oh, mum! Oh, mum!" she dropped down into a chair, hiding her face on her arms on the table. Ruth knew she cried. "My Lissy! Oh, mum—"

Ruth, with a kind arm round the big shoulders,

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laughed. "Katy! don't cry! I shouldn't cry if Marion was in love with a nice young man."

"Mum," said Katy, looking up, her eyes agonized with joy, "yer would. It's grand—but a mother knows. Yer wait till Miss Marion gets married an' goes off from yer. Oh, but I'm proud, though! . . . Lissy don't want me to spend the money to come to the weddin'? Well, now, h'ain't that thoughtful in her! Girls h'ain't that way, often. 'Course I'm goin'. Mary an' me'll go to that weddin' if we walk! But we won't walk," she said, wagging her head with the rough swagger of pride; "I'll take money out of the bank, an' pay our fares! I'll treat Mary. Please, mum, write to 'er, an' tell 'er the news. We'll surprise Lissy, 'er an' me. We won't tell 'er we're comin'. And, Mrs. Eliot, don't be lettin' on to Miss Marion; we'll surprise 'er, too. We'll just go walkin' in, an' I'll say, 'Lissy, me love, nothin' could keep me from yer!' And then I'll give me other girl a big 'ug and kiss." . . .

"I think you better tell Lissy you are coming," Ruth urged.

But Katy had made up her mind. "No, me love. Don't mention it to 'em, if yer please. Oh, Mrs. Eliot, I could die, now, from pleasure."

"*Nunc dimittis!*" said Professor Eliot, listening to his wife's account of this supreme moment.

"Apparently," Ruth said, "it never occurred to her that Lissy's marriage puts an end to her dream of the time when they could live together and Lissy would teach school."

"More pelican business," Professor Eliot said, blowing his nose with unnecessary vigor. "Ruth, if this

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young man is a gentleman, he may appreciate Katy; if he isn't he won't, and—well, when I am President I shall have a law passed forbidding any young man to marry Marion unless he sees what a noble soul lurks under my rude exterior. Dear, do tell Marion to break it to Lissy that her mother is coming. The child really should be warned!"

Ruth shook her head. "No; Katy doesn't want me to."

"But, Ruth, consider! It will be an awful shock to Lissy. I can see Katy 'walkin' in!' Let Marion sort of prepare her."

But Katy's lady was firm. "Katy trusts me," she said; "I can't."

"Well," Professor Elliot said, "I think you're wrong; but for heaven's sake, when Katy goes to this confounded wedding, do see that she is properly dressed! Poor Lissy has some rights."

No one was more anxious that she should be "properly dressed" for Lissy's wedding than was Katy herself, and her humble desire for guidance made it easy to eliminate things for which she wildly planned during the next three proud months. For the first time in all her years in the Eliot family Katy neglected her work. Her mistress would find her standing at the wash tub, her hands motionless in the soapy water; or the cake would burn in the oven, or the coffee boil over on the stove. . . .

Her Lissy, a lady, was going to marry a gentleman.

Of course, the coffee boiled over! . . . And, of course, she would wear anything her mistress wanted her to, so as not to be shamin' the child! "A *plain* bunnit, mum? Me own judgment, fer weddin', would

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be pink—an' a nice plume. Maybe blue? But yer know best. . . . Yer don't like me brooch? It's 'andsome mum. It cost me a quarter. Well, if yer say no, I'd just as lief not. Oh, Mrs. Eliot, I am so fearful of shamin' Lissy on 'er weddin' day! I'll wear whatever yer say, mum."

Once, in those weeks before the wedding, Ruth Eliot, passing the kitchen door, saw Katy standing before the calendar that hung between the windows, marking off the days which brought her nearer to the great Day—the twenty-third of June. Over and over, after the fashion of a simple mind, she would repeat her plans to her lady: "I'll go to Mercer on the afternoon stage on Monday; an' I'll stay the night at Mary Jones; then me an' 'er take the Tuesday mornin' train, an' we'll git to Ebbenstown that evenin'; an' we'll find a boardin' 'ouse. Then, the next day, we'll go to Lissy's feller's church. I'm glad 'e's pious. Yer can see that by 'is goin' to church. Mary Jones will 'ave grand clothes, yer see if she don't! Lissy'll be proud of Mary's clothes. Oh, won't she be surprised when she sees us walkin' in! An' Miss Marion!—well, she'll gimme the 'ug! An' then Lissy'll make 'er gentleman acquainted with 'er momma—an' Mary Jones. She loves Mary next best to me."

Katy had not much upon which to base her trusting forecasts of her daughter's joy. Marion's letters had told the family the day, the place, and the hour of the wedding; but Clarissa's were little more than the reiterated command: "Don't think of coming!" Katy, unbetrayed by her lady ("She has a right to her own plans," Ruth told her husband stoutly), had given no hint of what was going to happen; so, as the day

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drew near, Lissy ceased to be apprehensive; but she was miserably ashamed of herself, and her shame made her more than usually reluctant to ask her mother for "a little money—for my wedding dress. I will pay it back as soon as I can," she wrote. As it happened this letter crossed one from Katy containing some money which was to be used (so Mrs. Eliot said) for this very purpose. "Pay me back?" Katy said, proudly, when Lissy's embarrassed letter was read to her; "well! If I can't buy me own child's weddin' dress, I'm in a bad way! And I *h'ain't* in a bad way! Look at me savin's in the bank."

Considering those savings, it was a little hard that poor Ruth should have been reproached by her own indignant daughter. "Lissy says" Marion wrote, "that Katy isn't coming to the wedding! I think that's perfectly awful! I think you and father ought to give her the money to come!"

After this filial rebuke, it took, Ruth said, the grace of God to keep her from expressing her opinion to Lissy. But the grace of God did even more than that for Mrs. Eliot; it enabled her to write a not too cold letter to Katy's child, asking her to come, on her wedding journey, to Old Chester and "visit her mother." Lissy replied politely that unfortunately she couldn't accept Mrs. Eliot's kind invitation, because she and Mr. Wood were going East for their wedding trip. She was sorry, she said, not to have answered more promptly, but she had been very busy finishing her valedictory—"Civilization and the Symbolism of Gothic Art."

Professor Eliot threw up his hands. "'Gothic Art!'" Do you suppose she has ever had the faintest

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glimpse of a Gothic soul—with a shawl over its head?"

Katy, however, marking off the days on the kitchen calendar was not aware of the beauty of her soul, nor of the brevity of her girl's letters. Her one thought was of Lissy's happiness, and her own determination "not to shame her." And at last the day came for her to set out. . . . She was to spend the night with Mary Jones, about whose presence at the wedding there was, unhappily, some doubt, because the good Mrs. Jones had been laid up with rheumatism. "I 'ope she can go!" Katy told her lady, anxiously, "because she is so stylish; *she'd* never be shamin' Lissy—like I might 'ave, if yer 'adn't fixed me up, mum," she said, her sweet eyes full of gratitude for Ruth's ruthlessness about feathers and breastpins. There had been a little difference of opinion between them as to whether Katy, to save money, should not take the long trudge into Mercer, barefoot, and lugging her carpet bag; but Ruth pointed out that the dust would spoil the "plain bunnit"; and then Professor Eliot settled it by ordering the stage to stop, and paying Katy's fare. So she started off, with a large, damp package in her hand—"It's a box of Miss Myggie's Bride roses fer Lissy to wear on 'er buzzom," she explained to Maggie's mother; "it will be like 'avin me little Myggie there with me!"

"The supreme moment!" Professor Eliot said, as he and Ruth stood watching the stage tug up the road, Katy smiling and nodding at them from the back window; "how few of us," he meditated, "see of the travail of our souls, and are satisfied."

That was the twenty-first. On the morning of the

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twenty-third, Lissy's wedding day—a June morning of dew and wings and blossoming hayfields—just at breakfast time, when Ruth Eliot was doing all the things Katy had sternly instructed her must be done "*just right*, for the master's breakfast—and mind ye, no lumps in the porridge!" some one came up the path, and, smiling, opened the kitchen door. It was Katy.

"I didn't go mum," she said.

She was perfectly matter-of-course about it, even laughing at Ruth's alarmed and questioning amazement. "Well, mum," she explained, "I thought it over on the stage; I'd been eneasie fer a day or two—thinkin'. An' then I talked to Mary Jones—Mary couldn't go—she's stiff with rheumatiz—she's got to move, 'er place is so damp. An' she told me so many things I must do fer manners, bobbin' round among Lissy's feller's folks—that I got eneasier an' eneasier. And confused in me mind. I got nervous, mum. So I thought it over, an' I says, 'Mary, *yer* would be real elegant and fashionable; to look at yer, folks would almost take yer fer a lady. Yer know manners,' I told 'er. And Mary says, 'Yes, I do,' she says. 'But I can't just put 'em on,' I says; 'they fall off me when I h'ain't thinkin'. They h'ain't natural to me,' I told 'er. An' so I says"—the tears stood suddenly in the smiling hazel eyes—"I says, 'Maybe I'd better not go? It would be crool to shame Lissy.' An' Mary says, 'Well,' she says, 'if I could go along with yer, it would be all right; I could keep yer from doing vulgar things before Lissy's feller's grand people.' 'But yer can't,' I says; 'so I won't go.' Well, at first Mary wouldn't 'ave it. She cried—kind o' sorry fer what she'd said—an' she says, 'Oh, never mind,' she says;

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'go! Keep yer' nose in the air, an' *go!* Yer 'er mother!' An' I says, 'No, I won't.' An' I walked 'ome, mum; I started in the even', an' come along slow an' pleasant. It was lovely walkin'—lookin' at the stars. Oh, mum, I thought of that night I looked at 'em when she was—maybe dyin'! I set down once by the river, an' et me cold sausages Mary put up fer me; an' I 'eard the water runnin'. Pretty! An' I thought of Lissy—gettin' married. Oh, mum, it was 'eaven!' She bit her trembling lip. Then she laughed; and the exalted look faded into happy shrewdness. "I was glad to save the price of the stage; I'll 'ave to be buyin' a christenin' dress fer me grandchild next year! But I wouldn't shame the bride," she said.

"Katy," Ruth said, swallowing hard, "I don't believe *any* mother ever loved her child as you love Lissy! Ashamed of you? She'd be proud of you! Any girl would be proud of such a mother!"

"I was sorry," Katy said, "not to get Miss Myggie's Bride roses to her. They wilted, some; but I put 'em in water at Mary Jones's. She said they smelled 'eavenly.'"

Then Ruth Eliot cried outright. "I can't *bear* it that you should be so disappointed!"

But Katy, her own face twitching, would not let her cry. "There, there, me love! Why, it's nothin' at all. I wasn't 'disappointed,' because, when I got to thinkin', I didn't *want* to go. There h'ain't no 'disappointment' when yer don't want a thing; an' Miss Marion will be writin' us all about it! But when they get back from their weddin tower, I'll go, if yer give me lief, to visit 'em. I want to see me son," she said, proudly.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT summer, after the wedding, Katy so ached to see her girl that twice she asked Mrs. Eliot to write Lissy that she would come and visit her on such and such a date; but, curiously enough, each time that she set a day, a telegram arrived explaining that Lissy was "so sorry," but it was "not convenient."

"H'ain't it funny," Katy said, disappointedly, "that I just 'it on the wrong time fer 'er? I couldn't go in July, with me early preservin' to do; but I thought August would be all right—before peach-butter time. I can't go in September—Mary Jones will be 'untin' fer a tenement, an' movin', and I'd be in the way. So I'll go, if yer'll give me lief, mum, the first of October, after I get our curtains made over."

It was at these times of postponement that Katy's regret for her illiteracy became actual pain. She loved her lady, and Marion was like another child to her, and little Myggie was waiting for her in Heaven; yet, after all, these beloveds were not her very own. Rooted in that primal reticence of hers were sweet privacies of maternity, which were only for Lissy. She longed to speak certain words of counsel to her girl—but she could not write them, and they must not be written by anyone else! And she believed that there were young secrecies which Lissy wanted to write to her—but she could not read them, and they

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must not be read, even by Mrs. Eliot;—"things about 'er gentleman 'usband, an' if 'e's good to 'er, or if 'e's too fond of 'is glass, an' whether 'er mother-in-law treats 'er good—I'll tear the eyes out of 'er 'ead, if she don't! Lissy can't be lettin' on about 'is family to Mrs. Eliot. 'Twouldn't be proper be'aved to do that. Oh, I *wisht* I could read and write—so long as Lissy h'ain't let to invite me!" . . . "I believe," she told Ruth, "it's 'is mother 'as stopped 'er from 'avin' company—fer I know the child's longin' fer me. The old lady's afraid I'll eat too much," Katy said, contemptuously; "that's the way with some rich folks—they look at every mouthful you take. Well, she needn't worry. I can pay fer a meal's victuals—look at me savin's in the bank!"

But as she could not go to see her girl, there was nothing for it but to be satisfied with Lissy's infrequent letters—and with the hope of that October visit. "But don't tell 'er I'm lottin' on it," Katy warned Mrs. Eliot; "I h'ain't goin' to give 'is mother the chance to make my child feel small by sayin', another time, that it 'h'ain't convenient!" Say, mum, I'd like to let 'er know she h'ain't the only person with money. I wonder, when I see 'er, could I 'old me bank book in me 'and, kind o' careless-like—the way yer do yer ticket case, when yer go out callin'?"

The balance in Katy's bank book had increased slightly of late, because Lissy had begun that "paying back" she had so long promised herself. Her "dootifulness," as her mother called it (her mother, who had never, in all Lissy's life, done one single thing for her from a sense of "duty!")—Lissy's "paying back" made Katy very happy. "It isn't every girl

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would do it," she told her lady proudly; "but she'd ought to be keepin' it in 'er own pocket. Even if she *is* livin' grand in 'is mother's 'ouse (where she can't invite 'er mother to visit 'er), she'd ought to 'ave 'er own spendin' money, fer young mothers need lots of beer. Well," she admitted, a little sheepishly—for Lissy's letters had not indicated any need of beer—"never mind! She will, sometime. So this 'ere money of 'ers will just go into the bank. She'll get it back, one of these days! Well, she's been a good daughter to me, h'ain't she?—an' look at the letters she writes to me now!" She was placidly certain that Lissy's unwillingness to have Mrs. Eliot know her private affairs, accounted for the brevity of those letters and the absence of any intimate information in them. Curiously enough, the nearest approach to intimacy was once when Lissy asked for information for herself: "Was that English lady," Lissy wrote, "for whom I was named, any relation to me?"

When Ruth read that, Katy doubled up with laughter. "Me lady—a *relation*? Well, h'ain't Lissy simple? Me, a work-'ouse girl, an' me lady a grand lady!"

So Ruth wrote back that Katy said that, so far as she knew, she, Katy, had no relatives at all in England; and as for Lady Clarissa—Katy could hardly speak for laughing, "Tell 'er, mum, me lady h'ain't any more relation to me than the Queen is!"

Ruth, telling Professor Eliot about Clarissa's question, said, with a puzzled look, "Jim, do you suppose poor Lissy is trying to hold up her end with Mr. Wood's family? Marion said that his mother was a terrible climber!"

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Her guess was correct. But Katy chuckling all that day at the wash tub or the stove, over the humor of her child's question, did not see its possible significance. Yet it lay in her mind, at first because it was so ridiculous; then with slowly growing wonder as to why it had been asked; and by and by, with a glimmer of understanding: Lissy was a lady, an' she'd be wantin' 'is family to think she was as good as they was, an' they *would* think so if she 'ad grand relations at 'ome—"grander," Katy knew, "than any of these 'ere American people!" Yes; she believed she knew why Lissy had asked that foolish question, and she wished she could tell her to keep her nose in the air, even if she wasn't a born lady. But when she suggested using this particular phrase in a letter to Lissy, Mrs. Eliot discouraged her. "I don't believe Lissy would like you to put it that way," Ruth advised, gently.

"If it wasn't a wrong story," Katy said, smiling, "I'd say, just fer fun, to please 'er, that she was me lady's cousin! But 'course I can't. But when I visit 'er, I'll tell 'er to go on bein' a lady, 'erself. Say, mum, h'ain't it as good to make yerself a lady, like Lissy 'as, as it is just to be one, like Lady Clarissy? It wasn't no credit to 'er to be a lady; she couldn't 'elp it!" Ruth's friendly agreement made Katy so supremely happy that she was eager to share her discovery with Lissy; so she suddenly decided, though it was still September, that her visit should be no longer postponed. "I'll be goin' on Wednesday, an' I'll stay the night with Mary—I guess she's got moved by this time; the neighbors'll tell me where she's gone to. *She* won't say it 'h'ain't convenient!" As fer Lissy's lady mother-in-law, I won't give 'er the chance to say

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so," she told Ruth Eliot; "I won't be be'olden to 'er! I'll go to a boardin' 'ouse. If yer please, mum, will yer ask Lissy to find a boardin' place fer me?"

The first line of Ruth's note: "Your mother will arrive on Thursday; she will board somewhere if it is not convenient to have her with you" was such a shock to Lissy that the rest of the letter—"Please say to Mrs. Wood that Professor Eliot and I feel your mother to be our dear and honored friend"—was meaningless to her.

The letter gave Lissy only twenty-four hours' notice; for the very day she received it her mother started, carrying in her carpet bag gifts (selected, mercifully, by Mrs. Eliot) for the whole Wood family: a book for one, candy for another, and so on. "Me own judgment would be finery fer 'is mother," said Katy, resignedly; "lace, maybe. I could buy a yard at the store fer 'alf a dollar; 'andsome lace, it is. But yer know best, mum. Mrs. Eliot, I suppose I'll be eatin' with the family—?"

"Well, I should hope so!" Ruth said, hotly; but Katy's mild surprise made her ashamed.

"There's nothing wrong with eatin' in a kitchen—if it's clean," she said; "an' I know me place. But Lissy'll be wantin' me with 'er every minute; that's why I was askin'. Only—I *wisht* yer'd learned me manners, mum."

"Your manners are all right!" Ruth encouraged her, but her heart sank.

So Katy started. She had hardly left the house before a despatch came from Lissy again "regretting" that it was "not convenient"—etc., etc., "What *am* I to do?" Ruth said. "I don't know Mrs. Jones' ad-

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dress, so I can't forward it to Katy. I'll just telegraph Lissy that she's on the way."

"What a coward she is!" Marion said, contemptuously.

It was only Professor Eliot who had any sympathy for the paltry and frantic terror which had prompted Lissy's telegram. "Do you know anybody who, under the circumstances, wouldn't be a coward?" he asked. "Of course, there is only one comfortable path for Lissy—the *truth*. If she had had the courage, in the first place, to flaunt Katy in the faces of these Woods, she wouldn't have a qualm now! Well, as I have before remarked, when I am President I shall do much to improve my country: I shall change the Declaration of Independence by cutting out the lie that we are all 'created equal,' and I will also add an Amendment to the Constitution to the effect that every family in this Land of the Free shall be obliged to bring out of its closet the American Skeleton, which is—the truth about its forebears! Then there won't be any more scared Lissys, because we shall know that the other fellow's closet is as full of bones as our own. I bet the Woods' skeleton is gristly! And, Marion, you will enjoy hearing *our* skeleton rattle, though I never kept it in a closet; I proclaimed upon the housetops the fact that when mamma and I were married, your blessed mother, being the wife of a poor man, did all the housework, *and* the washing!"

Katy, jogging along in the stage to Mercer, in the hazy September sunshine, did not know that she was her daughter's skeleton, and had no doubts as to her welcome—Lissy would be "wantin' to be with 'er every minute!" She hunted up Mary Jones, and stopped

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over that night with her. Mary surveyed her clothes with meager approval. "The *stuff's* good," Mary admitted, rubbing Katy's skirt between a doubtful thumb and forefinger; "but mercy me! Couldn't you have some piping on the seams? Red, maybe, or green? And ain't you got a brooch to wear? I'll lend you mine."

"Mrs. Eliot thought it was more stylish fer me not to," Katy said; "*she* knows, Mary. *She's* a lady, like our people at 'ome. It's folks like Mrs. Eliot an' me lady that don't need brooches—like us. I don't know but what I'm above me station, not wearin' 'em," she said simply.

"Well, don't make small of yourself," Mary warned her, anxiously; and the next morning, when Katy started for the haven where she would be—her daughter's waiting arms—Mrs. Jones's last words to her were, "Mind! Keep your nose in the air!"

One can't help pitying Lissy; yes; no matter *how* cowardly one may think her, one must pity her, for she suffered. She suffered quite excruciatingly. She had had three months of living with her husband's people, and she knew exactly how Katy would affect Mrs. Wood, Sr.—a vulgar, ambitious, irritably timid woman, whose adoration of "the proper thing" was as acute as it was relatively recent. I suppose it would be only fair to Lissy to give that side of the situation. But this isn't the story of *her* soul! It's enough to say that she had put the happiness of her whole future in jeopardy by having a secret from her husband, who, Marion always said, would, after the first shock, have swallowed Katy with good-natured roars of laughter, and, by and by, with true appreciation of the dear

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heart of her. But, instead of trusting him, Lissy, terrified, refrained from telling him (and, of course, his family) any details whatever of Katy—the knife blade (of the past; Katy had long since achieved a fork); the shining shawled head, subdued to the inappropriate “bunnet”; the bare feet for summer sense and comfort; the absent English h’s, the grammar, to which had been added every nasal Americanism of Mercer and Old Chester; the loud, merry, guffawing laughter. Lissy had not told him these things—nor had she told him of the love that had suffered long and was kind; that was not easily provoked; that envied not, and vaunted not itself, nor was puffed up; and that rejoiced in Truth!

When the letter came, announcing Katy’s imminence, Lissy had hurried to the telegraph office and sent her scotching message: “Not convenient!” But Mrs. Eliot’s reply, which arrived late at night, saying that Katy would appear the next day, brought her face to face with the Inevitable Moment. . . . Unless—oh, Katy’s own suggestion: *a boarding house*? Clarissa knew of one, kept by a Mrs. Baker—if she could get a room there? She lay awake all that night, her heart pounding in her throat, her whole body tense with the desire for dawn, so that she could rush out to Mrs. Baker’s, and arrange for a hiding place! If she could do that, all the hideously mortifying contingencies which she had been picturing to herself during the last six months would be at least postponed. She could shut her mother up in the boarding house—but she must not tell Mrs. Baker who “Mrs. McGrath” was! If she did that, Mrs. Baker would gossip. . . . So, very carefully, she thought it out, lying there wide-

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eyed, and seeing the dawn come grayly against the window. As far as the boarding house went, it was all simple enough. She would say, "Mrs. McGrath is the *housekeeper* in the family of a friend of mine." (The noble word, "servant," had never been spoken, even in Lissy's mind.) A housekeeper; "and—and—she took care of me when I was little." Not a lie. Both statements were fairly exact. Her real difficulty would be to make Katy make the same statements. Would her mother call herself a "housekeeper"? Would she say she had been young Mrs. Wood's "nurse"? Lissy realized, with panic, that under such circumstances it is necessary for two people to tell the same truth—or the same lie! Could she depend upon Katy (who had never told a lie in her life) to refrain from telling the truth? "I'll *make* her," Lissy thought, frantically.

With all this misery of uncertainty, Lissy, when she met her mother at the railroad station, was so white that, for a moment, Katy was frightened, instead of happy. Then happiness flooded back in passionately maternal hope: "Darlin', yer gashly white! Oh, Lissy, is it—is it—?"

"Please," Lissy said, breathless, "let me straighten your bonnet, it's—dreadful!" It was—having slipped back until it almost rested on her shoulders.

Katy, laughing loudly to keep her eyes from brimming over with a love that was diamond-bright with tears, said, "Well, h'ain't yer the great girl to look after yer mamma! Yes, straighten it, me love, an' thank yer kindly. If I'd wore me shawl, it wouldn't a' slipped. . . . No, no; don't yer be touchin' that

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carpet bag—a young married lady mustn't be luggin' bags! Lissy, where's yer 'usband?"

Lissy, hurrying her down the platform to bury her in a cab, said, "I didn't happen to tell him you were coming." She hardly knew what she said; she had not seen her mother for nearly four years, and though she had thought she knew "the worst," as she would have expressed it, the reality of Katy's appearance, her language, laugh, illiteracy, absolutely overwhelmed her! If Mrs. Wood, Sr.—if the academic society of the small college town—if Richard himself, should see Katy and hear her,—“I'd *die!*” Lissy thought.

She hardly spoke as they drove to the boarding-house; and once there, she rushed Katy upstairs so swiftly that her mother, hobbling in her shoes of love, was out of breath. But when Lissy opened the door of the room she had engaged Katy beamed with pleasure.

“Why, h'ain't this fine!” she said, staring about in open-mouthed admiration, while Lissy, panting, tried to help her off with her coat. Katy, seeing her girl's very apparent agitation, said, with a sweet, shrewd look, “Don't be shy with momma!” Then she sat down, and, laughing loudly, began to unbutton her boots. “I can't live stylish *all* the time,” she said; “open me bag, an' see the presents I've brought fer yer all—yer 'usband an' 'is father an' mother—say, Lissy, *does she treat yer good?* 'Course, she's a lady; but ladies h'ain't always good to their sons' wives, any more than we are. But I'll fix 'er if she treats yer mean! Tell momma all about everything. That's why I came—to see fer meself if all is well with yer.”

“Of course, it is,” Clarissa said; “but, mother,

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please don't talk that way—I mean saying things like that about Dick's mother."

"That's right!" Katy said, heartily; "stick up fer 'is folks to everybody—except momma. Yer can tell momma 'bout 'em. She'll damn 'em well if they h'ain't good to yer. Lissy, them shoes 'bout killed me! Well, lovey,"—she was radiant with excited joy—"open the bag!"

Clarissa obeyed, speechlessly, and Katy's happiness in taking out those poor little presents made her oblivious to the agony of her daughter's silence. "That's a book; it's fer 'is mother. Mrs. Eliot gimme it out of the master's study. 'Po'ms' she called it. She thought it was fine—an' I didn't 'ave to pay money fer it. An' Mr. Eliot gimme those cigars fer yer father-in-law. Lissy, does 'e treat you good? Men is more likely to, than women. Women is meaner 'an men. An' then, fer yer 'usband, me dear," her eyes brimmed, and she touched, very lovingly, a little package which Ruth Eliot's tender hands had tied up with pretty ribbons; "I brought yer little letters that yer printed out when yer was just learnin'. I h'ain't never read 'em—poor momma h'ain't no reader! But many's the time I've wore 'em in me buzzom, I was so proud of 'em! Yer 'usband must keep 'em careful—an' give 'em to 'is first daughter. Fer your son," she said proudly, "I'll spend money!"

"Mother," Clarissa broke in; "I am going to ask you to be very careful at the table. Some of the professors board here, who are friends of ours; and—and if you wouldn't mind eating properly . . ."

"Oh," said Katy cheerfully, "I don't mind. An' I use a fork fine now-a-days."

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Lissy's heart beat so hard that her breath broke. "And, mother, perhaps you'll—not talk, very much? You see—your grammar is—I mean you don't speak as—my friends do."

"Tell me just what I h'ain't to say," Katy said.

"Oh," Lissy said, passionately, "don't say anything!"

"What?" Katy said, bewildered; "yer don't want me to speak *at all*? But that h'ain't manners, Lissy."

"I didn't mean exactly that," Lissy said; "but won't you just try to be—like other people?"

"But I h'ain't like 'em," Katy said mildly. She was taking her little presents up and looking at them, and putting them down. Lissy had not noticed them. "This is fer yer, me love," she said, and handed something to Lissy; "it's only sweetmeats, but—"

"Oh, thank you," said Lissy; "I am much obliged." Katy, in eager anticipation of her pleasure, watched her; but Lissy put the box down, unopened. "Mother," she stammered, "I—I told Mrs. Baker that you were Professor Eliot's housekeeper."

"Well, lately, it's about that," Katy said, gravely; "Mrs. Eliot h'ain't real well, and when Miss Marion's away I run our 'ouse best I can. I'm worried about me dear lady," Katy said. Then, more cheerfully, she dived down into her carpet bag and took out the sober best dress which Ruth Eliot had achieved for her. "Look at that fer style!"

Lissy looked, in cringing silence.

"Well!" said Katy, stroking the dress with respectful hands; "now let's set down, an' talk! Oh, Lissy, I've got that much to tell yer, I don't know where to begin!—an' it's the same with yer. Me dear, I sus-

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picion Miss Marion 'as a feller! I declare, you two girls will be makin' grandmothers of Mrs. Eliot an' me, before we know it! But, Lissy, love, where's yer 'usband? Will 'e come in to see me to-night? Or will yer be takin' me to 'is 'ouse, so I can make me dooty to 'is mother?"

"Why, some friends of ours are coming in this evening, so I think it will be better to—to—wait." . .

Katy was silent for a moment; then: "You 'ave a lot of friends, h'ain't you, love? Well, friends is nice. But yer glad to see yer momma; I know that."

"Yes, of course. Very glad," Lissy said. Then she had a miserable inspiration: "I'll have your supper served up here. You are tired."

"Oh, I don't want no sluts of servant girls waitin' on *me*—" Katy began, but Lissy went on, breathlessly:

"And, mother, perhaps it will be best for you to say—I mean if you happen to speak to anyone about me, that—that you took care of me when I was a baby. I told Mrs. Baker you were good to me when I was a baby."

Her mother laughed. "An' wouldn't I be good to me own child?" she said; but she put her hand to her head in a bewildered way.

"I have to go now," Lissy said; "I'll come in in the morning."

"An' when will yer 'usband come to make 'is dooty to me?" Katy said; she had taken up that little unopened present and was holding it in unsteady hands but her voice was quiet with command and dignity; "when will me son-in-law pay 'is respects to yer mother, lovey?"

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"Perhaps to-morrow," Lissy said; "unless he isn't at home. He often goes away—"

"What!" Katy said; "is 'e neglectin' you, *a'ready?*" There was quick relief in her tone; to that Love which thinketh no evil of its beloved, this suspicion was more endurable than another suspicion. . . . "If 'e neglects yer—" she began, her voice raucous, "I'll take the 'ide off 'im!"

"No—of course he doesn't! Oh, mother, *don't* talk that way! I just haven't told him, yet, that—that you were coming."

"Did yer want to surprise 'im?" Katy pleaded. (Oh, it *must* be that; Lissy was just childish, and was goin' to play, and surprise her 'usband!) "Maybe yer'll be takin' me to-morrow to 'is 'ouse, 'an makin' me acquainted with 'im—an' 'is mother an' father? An' all these 'ere nice friends?"

"I'll—see," Lissy said faintly, and went quickly out of the room.

Katy looked at the door closing behind her. Then she said, very low, "*Me God!—*"

A moment later she looked down at her hands, saw that she was still holding that little gift, and ran, in her stocking feet, out into the hall—but paused at the head of the stairs, for Lissy, on the floor below, was speaking to some one:

"Yes, Mrs. Baker, she has come. Thank you, she likes the room very much. But she wants her dinner upstairs. Yes, she—she took care of me when I was a child. She was—my old nurse."

Katy crept back to her room on tiptoe.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT Katy did, and thought, and understood, during that night, no one ever knew. . . . When Lissy came in the next morning, with some feeble, truthful lie about not having mentioned her mother's presence to her husband and his family because they were all "very much occupied,"—Katy listened, silently. But in the midst of it she raised a commanding hand.

"Stop!" she said. Then, very gently, "don't tell a wrong story . . . Mrs. Wood."

Clarissa's recoil at these two words was absolute fright. "*Mrs. Wood!*"

Katy looked at her, and smiled. Her tenderness enveloped Lissy; it touched her frightened mind, as strong, wise hands might touch and reassure a frightened body; it meant: "Don't be troubled. I will take care of you." But what she said was very brief: "The young gentleman's mother, bein' a fine lady, is wantin' a lady daughter-in-law. Lovey—keep yer nose in the air! Tell 'er," Katy paused; then looked up. Her eyes seemed to see something above Clarissa, something beyond her; she made a curious gesture with her hand, as if to wave farewell to far-off heights—to pearly gates through which she would never pass. . . . Then she turned and looked at Lissy, and her voice was Love: "Tell yer lady mother-in-law, mum,

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that she needn't look down on yer. Tell 'er yer come from grand folks—a cousin yer was of me lady's, in England. Tell 'er I was just yer' nurse—just a servant who took care of yer. . . . I wasn't yer mother at all. I made it up, I was."

She got back to Mary Jones late that night. She climbed upstairs, very slowly and heavily, and fumbled at the door knob. "It's me, Mary. Lissy's mother."

Mrs. Jones, opening the door, was dumbfounded. "Where on earth did you come from? Wasn't Lissy home? Well, mercy me, come in—an' I'll give you some liquor and a bit of food—you look wore out!"

"I am wore out," said Katy. She sat down in Mary Jones' old rocking chair, with a great breath of fatigue. "Thank you kindly, Mary. Yes, I'll eat. Then I'll tell yer."

The telling lasted almost until morning. They sat, these two fat, elderly women, by the stove—one frightened, crying, protesting; the other rigidly composed. . . . "She was dyin' o' shame o' me. I seen it. So I says, 'Yer come from fine folks,' I says."

"'Fine folks!' *Lissy?*"

"She thought I was crazy. She was scared. I says, 'Mrs. Wood, mum—' course, Mary, I know me place when I talk to me betters; so I says, 'Mrs. Wood, mum'—Mary, she was frightened! She suspicioned I'd gone out o' me 'ead! I says, 'Mrs. Wood, mum, I know yer lady mother-in-law 'as put yer in terror with 'er mean tongue, because she's so grand'—Mary, I could tear that woman's eyes out, joyful. But what's the use? Lissy 'as married 'igh up, an' she's got to live 'igh up. If she was always stoopin' down to me, 'er fashionable friends would think small of 'er. . . .

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She was tellin' me about 'er friends . . . I says, 'Yer mother-in-law h'ain't any grander than yer are.' "

"What did she say?"

"She didn't know what to say; she just bust out cryin'. 'Are yer tellin' me the truth?' she says. An' I says, 'Would I be lyin'? H'ain't I always told yer it was 'ell fer liars?' " Katy's face twitched.

Mrs. Jones threw up her hands in a despairing gesture.

" 'If I told a wrong story,' I says, 'I'd go to 'ell. Do you think I want to do that?' Then I says, 'Remember, Lovey, *Never tell a wrong story.*' "

"Well?" Mary said.

"Well, she turned on me, 'er 'eart breakin', Mary, to lose her momma. An' she says, 'But yer always said yer was me mother,' she says. Mary, just fer a minute I thought the child was gettin' the best of me. searchin' so, poor love, for 'er momma; an' I says, 'Didn't Mrs. Eliot tell yer I wasn't married?' I says; ' 'ow can I be yer momma, an' me not married? Yer should be ashamed,' I says, 'to be 'intin' such a thing to a respectable woman like me!' I says. Mary, to 'ear me, yer'd 'a thought I was awful displeased with 'er. 'I wasn't never married,' I says, very angry like."

Mrs. Jones stared, open-mouthed. Then she burst out in furious protest: "She'd ought to be ashamed—"

"Mary Jones! Yer me best friend, an' I love yer well; but if yer blame me girl, I'll never speak to yer again. Do yer 'ear? It's 'is crool mother 'as drove 'er to be ashamed of me; *she* wouldn't 'a been, no matter if she is a lady! Look 'ow good she's always been to me! Why, she 'ired a fine room fer me, an' *paid* fer it. An' she 'ad a tray sent up with food. I didn't

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eat it; me throat closed up on me; but she 'ad it there fer me. No; Lissy wouldn't never been ashamed of 'er momma, if that woman 'adn't 'a made 'er so."

"But fer a girl to deny her own mother—"

"Listen to me! Me child h'ain't denyin' me—I'm denyin' 'er."

Mary was speechless. Katy went on, monotonously . . . She had told Clarissa her folks was fine people—"they was related to me lady." But they had all died. Lady Clarissa, her cousin, was dead. "They was all dead." So Katy had taken her—Katy stumbled here, in telling her tale, badly; but she was able to be convincing when the one strained listener was so eager to be convinced. "Yer'd ought to 'a 'eard the questions she asked me! Me God, I didn't know what I'd be drove to sayin' next! 'Where is me family?' she says; an' I says, 'They're all dead. And buried,' I says; 'an' I've forgot their last names. So,' I says, 'I took yer. Mary Jones boarded yer. Yer h'ain't mine.'"

Mary was so stunned that she could only say, faintly, "'Tain't right."

"If she ever comes 'ere an' asks yer, yer'll say I told yer I wasn't 'er mother."

"But it's a lie, and—"

"I h'ain't askin' yer to lie, am I? All yer got to do is to say, 'Katy told me so.' That's no lie fer yer! Yer keep yer mouth shut, an' don't say nothin', 'cept what I tell yer—or I'll tear yer eyes out!"

"If she was mine," said Mary Jones, furiously, "I'd whale the life out of her!"

"She h'ain't yers. Yer'd be a proud woman if she was!" Mary sobbed, but Katy went on steadily; she

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broke down once, as she told of Lissy's terrified incredulity—"it killed me to be 'urtin' 'er so; but she says to me, 'ow good yer was to me!—an' yer not me mother!' so I says, kind o' car'less like, 'Oh, well, I'm fond of children.' . . . Well, Mary, when she got to believin' me, she come up an' put 'er arms around me, an' kissed me, like she'd kiss . . . 'er own mother."

But in all that long, anguished story there was one thing that Katy did not tell Mary Jones, one detail that was left out: those words spoken down in the hall—"my old nurse." But once, (trying to wrench the sword out of her heart!) she said, under her breath, "it was that woman that frightened 'er into sayin' it!"

"Sayin' what?" said Mary.

And Katy said, quickly, "Oh, nothin'; 'cept fer me to try to be like 'er fine friends. . . . Well, the woman can't make small of Lissy any more! I says, 'Tell yer 'usband's mother yer as good as she is, *an' better!* Yer come of grand people. An' when yer have yer babies,' I says, 'an' want a servant to take care of 'em, I'll come. Not fer wages,' I says." . . .

There was only one more step for Katy on this *via inferno*—her Mrs. Eliot. . . . She didn't walk back to Old Chester this time; she was too broken, body and soul. When the stage stopped at the Eliots' gate and she got out, she staggered a little coming up the path.

"I'm a bit tired, mum," she said; as her lady, in startled inquiry, came hurrying into the kitchen to greet her; "I'll be 'avin' a cup of tea, an' then, if you please, love, I'll be speakin' to you."

Ruth gave her one swift look, and questions died

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upon her lips. She made her sit down, and brought her the tea, and begged her to eat; Katy silently shook her head, but she tried to smile. "Thank yer kindly, mum, but I h'ain't 'ungry." She drank her tea, and then they went up to Mrs. Eliot's room, and Ruth closed the door. They sat down, and Ruth took the two big trembling hands in hers. "Now tell me," she said.

"Mum, I went an' saw 'er. An' she was ashamed of me. 'is mother put it into 'er with 'er crool tongue. Don't think mean of Lissy; it was 'is mother. But she was ashamed of me. So I felt it me dooty to tell 'er—" She paused and looked at her lady; it seemed as if she measured with her eye the abyss which, somehow, she must bridge; "Mum, I will surprise yer—I surprised Mary Jones, too. But I must tell yer. I told Lissy the truth: she h'ain't my child."

"Katy!"

Ruth's recoil was like Lissy's—fright. Had Lissy's mother gone out of her senses?

Katy nodded, her eyes fierce with purpose. "She h'ain't mine. Do yer understand that, Mrs. Eliot? *She h'ain't mine.* Yer'll tell 'er (if ever she asks yer), that I told yer that I wasn't 'er mother."

The two women looked at each other; some wordless knowledge passed between them. Then Ruth Eliot put her arms round her friend and servant, and wept, silently.

"I'll be goin' to bed, mum," Katy said; she got up, then turned and looked at Ruth. "I won't never see me little Myggie," she said.

AN OLD CHESTER SECRET

CHAPTER I

THERE was not a person in Old Chester less tainted by the vulgarity of secretiveness than Miss Lydia Sampson. She had no more reticence than sunshine or wind, or any other elemental thing. How much of this was due to conditions it would be hard to say; certainly there was no "reticence" in her silence as to her neighbors' affairs; she simply didn't know them! Nobody ever dreamed of confiding in Lydia Sampson! And she could not be reticent about her own affairs because they were inherently public. When she was a girl she broke her engagement to Mr. William Rives two weeks before the day fixed for the wedding—and the invitations were all out! So of course everybody knew *that*. To be sure, she never said why she broke it, but all Old Chester knew she hated meanness, and felt sure that she had given her William the choice of being generous or being jilted—and he chose the latter. As she grew older the joyous, untidy makeshifts of a poverty which was always hospitable and never attempted to be genteel, stared you in the face the minute you entered her house; so everybody knew she was poor. Years later, her renewed engagement to Mr. Rives, and his flight some ten minutes before the marriage ceremony, were known to everybody because we had all been invited to the wedding, which cost (as we happened to know, because we had presented her with just exactly that amount) *a hundred dollars!* At the sight of such extravagance the thrifty William turned tail and ran,

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and we gave thanks and said he was a scoundrel to make us thankful, though, with the exception of Doctor Lavendar, we deplored the extravagance as much as he did! As for Doctor Lavendar, he said that it was a case of the grasshopper and the ant; "but Lydia is a gambling grasshopper," said Doctor Lavendar; "she took tremendous chances, for suppose the party *hadn't* scared William off?"

So, obviously, anything which was personal to Miss Lydia was public property. She simply couldn't be secretive.

Then, suddenly, and in the open (so to speak) of her innocent candor, a Secret pounced upon her! At first Old Chester didn't know that there was a secret. We merely knew that on a rainy December day (this was about eight months after William had turned tail) she was seen to get into the Mercer stage, carrying a carpetbag in one hand and a bandbox in the other. This was surprising enough—for why should Lydia Sampson spend her money on going to Mercer? Yet it was not so surprising as the fact that she did not come back from Mercer! And even that was a comparative surprise; the superlative astonishment was when it became known that she had left her door key at the post office and said she didn't know when she would return!

"Where on earth has she gone?" said Old Chester. But only Mrs. Drayton attempted to reply:

"It certainly looks *very* strange," said Mrs. Drayton.

It was with the turning of her front-door key that Miss Lydia made public confession of secrecy—although she had resigned herself to it, privately, three

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months before. The Secret had taken possession of her one hazy September evening, as she was sitting on her front doorstep, slapping her ankles when a mosquito discovered them, and watching the dusk falling like a warm veil across the hills. The air was full of the scent of evening primroses, and Miss Lydia, looking at a clump of them close to the step, could see the pointed buds begin to unfurl, then hesitate, then tremble, then opening with a silken burst of sound, spill their perfume into the twilight. Except for the crickets, it was very still. Once in a while some one plodded down the road, and once, when it was quite dark, Mr. Smith's victoria rumbled past, paused until the iron gates of his driveway swung open, then rumbled on to his big, handsome house. He was one of the new Smiths, having lived in Old Chester hardly twenty years; when he came he brought his bride with him—a Norton, she was, from New England. A nice enough woman, I suppose, but not a Pennsylvanian. He and his wife built this house, which was so imposing that for some time they were thought of, contemptuously, as the *rich* Smiths. But by and by Old Chester felt more kindly and just called them the new Smiths. Mrs. Smith died when their only child, Mary, was a little girl, and Mr. Smith grew gradually into our esteem. The fact was, he was so good-looking and good-humored and high-tempered (he showed his teeth when he was in a rage, just as a dog does) Old Chester *had* to like him—even though it wished he was a better landlord to Miss Lydia, to whom he rented a crumbling little house just outside his gates. In matters of business Mr. Smith exacted his pound of flesh—and he got it! In Lydia's

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case it sometimes really did represent "flesh," for she must have squeezed her rent out of her food. Yet when, after her frightful extravagance in giving that party on money we had given her for the rebuilding of her chimney, Mr. Smith rebuilt it himself, and said she was a damned plucky old bird.—"Looks like a wet hen," said Mr. Smith, "but plucky! plucky!"—after that, our liking for him became quite emphatic. Not that Old Chester liked his epithets or approved of his approval of Miss Lydia's behavior (she bought kid gloves for her party, if you please! and a blue-silk dress; and, worse than all, presents for all Old Chester, of canary birds and pictures and what not, *all out of our hundred dollars!*)—we did not like the laxity of Mr. Smith's judgments upon the Grasshopper's conduct, but we did approve of his building her chimney, because it saved us from putting our hands into our own pockets again.

In the brown dusk of the September evening, Miss Lydia, watching her landlord roll past in his carriage, gave him a friendly nod. "He's nice," she said, "and so good-looking!" Her eyes followed him until, in the shadows of the great trees of the driveway, she lost sight of him. Then she fell to thinking about his daughter, a careless young creature, handsome and selfish, with the Smith high color and black eyes, who was engaged to be married to another handsome young creature, who was fatter at twenty-three than is safe for the soul of a young man. Miss Lydia did not mind Carl's fat because she had a heart for lovers. Apparently her own serial and unhappy love affair had but increased her interest in happier love affairs. To be sure, Mary's affair had had the zest of a little

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bit of unhappiness—just enough to amuse older people. The boy had been ordered off by his firm in Mercer, at a day's notice, to attend to some business in Mexico, and the wedding, which was to have been in April, had to be postponed for six months. Carl had been terribly down in the mouth about it, and Mary, in the twenty-four hours given them for farewells, had cried her eyes out, and even, at the last minute, just before her young man started off, implored her father to let them get married—which plea, of course, he laughed at, for the new Mr. Smith was not the sort of man to permit his only daughter to be married in such hole-and-corner fashion! As it happened, Carl got back, quite unexpectedly, in September—but his prospective father-in-law was obdurate.

"It won't hurt you to wait. 'Anticipation makes a blessing dear!' December first you can have her," said the new Mr. Smith much amused by the young people's doleful sentimentality.

Miss Lydia, now, slapping the mosquitoes, and thinking about the approaching "blessing," in friendly satisfaction at so much young happiness being next door to her, hugged herself because of her own blessings.

"I don't want to brag," she thought, "but certainly I am the luckiest person!" To count up her various pieces of luck (starting with the experience of being jilted) : She had a nice landlord who looked like Zeus, with his flashing black eyes and snow-white hair and beard. And she had so many friends! And she believed she could manage to make her black alpaca last another winter. "It is spotted," she thought, "but

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what real difference does a spot make?" (Miss Lydia was one of those rare people who have a sense of the relative values of life.) "It's a warm skirt," said Miss Lydia, weighing the importance of that spot with the expense of a new dress; "and, anyway, whenever I look at it, it just makes me think of the time I spilled the cream down the front at Harriet Hutchinson's. What a good time I had at Harriet's!" After that she reflected upon the excellent quality of her blue silk. "I shall probably wear it only once or twice a year; it ought to last me my lifetime," said Miss Lydia. . . . It was just as she reached this blessing that, somewhere in the shadows, a quivering voice called, "Miss Sampson?" and out of the darkness of the Smith driveway came a girlish figure. The iron gates clanged behind her, and she came up the little brick path to Miss Lydia's house with a sort of rush, a sort of fury; her voice was demanding and frightened and angry all together. "Miss Lydia!"

Miss Lydia, startled from her blessings, screwed up her eyes, then, recognizing her visitor, exclaimed: "Why, my dear! What is the matter?" And again, in real alarm, "What *is* it?" For Mary Smith, dropping down on the step beside her, was trembling. "My dear!" Miss Lydia said, in consternation.

"Miss Sampson, something—something has happened. A—a—an accident. I've come to you. I didn't know where else to go." She spoke with a sort of sobbing breathlessness.

"You did just right," said Miss Lydia, "but what—"

"You've got to help me! There's nobody else."

"Of course I will! But tell me—"

"If you don't help me, I'll die," Mary Smith said.

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She struck her soft clenched fist on her knee, then covered her face with her hands. "But you must promise me you won't tell? Ever—ever!"

"Of course I won't."

"And you'll help me? Oh, say you'll help me!"

"Have you and he quarreled?" said Miss Lydia quickly. Her own experience flashed back into her mind; it came to her with a little flutter of pride that this child—she was really only a child, just nineteen—who was to be married so soon, trusted to her worldly wisdom in such matters, and came for advice.

"She hasn't any mother," Miss Lydia thought, sympathetically. "If you've quarreled, you and he," she said, putting her little roughened hand on Mary's soft, shaking fist, "tell him you're sorry. Kiss and make up!" Then she remembered why she and her William had not kissed and made up. "Unless"—she hesitated—"he has done something that isn't nice?" ("Nice" was Miss Lydia's idea of perfection.) "But I'm sure he hasn't! He seemed to me, when I saw him, a very pleasing young man. So kiss and make up!"

The younger woman was not listening. "I had to wait all day to come and speak to you. I've been frantic—*frantic*—waiting! But I couldn't have anybody see me come. They would have wondered. If you don't help me—"

"But I will, Mary, I will! Don't you love him?"

"*Love him?*" said the girl. "My God!" Then, in a whisper, "If I only hadn't loved him—so *much*. . . I am going to have a baby."

It seemed as if Miss Lydia's little friendly chirp-

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ings were blown from her lips in the gust of these appalling words.

Mary herself was suddenly composed. "They sent him off to Mexico at twenty-four hours' notice; it was cruel—cruel, to send him away! and he came to say goodbye— And . . . And then I begged and begged father to let us get married; even the very morning that he went away, I said: 'Let us get married to-day. Please, father, *please!*' And he wouldn't, he wouldn't! He wanted a big wedding. Oh, what did I care about a big wedding? Still—I never supposed— But I went to Mercer yesterday and saw a doctor, and—and found out. I couldn't believe it was true. I said I'd die if it was true! And he said it was. . . . So then I rushed to Carl's office. . . . He was frightened—for me. And then we thought of you. And all day to-day I've just walked the floor—waiting to get down here to see you. I couldn't come until it was dark. Father thinks I'm in bed with a headache. I told the servants to tell him I had a headache. . . . We've got to manage somehow to make him let us get married right off. But—but even that won't save me. It will be known. It will be known—in January."

Miss Lydia was speechless.

"So you've got to help me. There's nobody else on earth who can. Oh, you must—you must!"

"But what can I do?" Miss Lydia gasped.

"Carl and I will go away somewhere. Out West where nobody knows us. And then you'll come. And you'll take—*It*. You'll take care of it. And you can have all the money you want."

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"My dear," Miss Lydia said, trembling, "this is very, very dreadful, but I—"

The girl burst into rending crying. "Don't you—suppose *I* know that it's—it's—it's dreadful?"

"But I don't see how I can possibly—"

"If you won't help me, I'll go right down to the river. Oh, Miss Lydia, help me! Please, *please* help me!"

"But it's impos—"

Mary stopped crying. "It isn't. It's perfectly possible! You'll simply go away to visit some friends—"

"I haven't any friends, except in Old Chester—"

"And when you come back you'll bring—*It* with you. And you'll say you've adopted it. You'll say it's the child of a friend."

Miss Lydia was silent.

"If you won't help me," Mary burst out, "I'll—"

"Does anybody know?" said Miss Lydia.

"No."

"Oh, my dear, my dear! You must tell your father."

"My *father*?" She laughed with terror.

Then Miss Lydia Sampson did an impossible thing—judging from Old Chester's knowledge of her character. She said, "He's got to know or I won't help you."

Mary's recoil showed how completely, poor child! she had always had her own way; to be crossed now by this timid old maid was like going head-on into a gray mist and finding it a stone wall. There was a tingling silence. "Then I'll kill myself," she said.

Miss Lydia gripped her small, work-worn hands together, but said nothing.

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"Oh, please help me!" Mary said.

"I will—if you'll tell your father or Doctor Laven-
dar. I don't care which."

"Neither!" said the girl. She got on her feet and stood looking down at little shabby Miss Lydia sitting on the step with her black frizette tumbling forward over one frightened blue eye. Then she covered her face with those soft, trembling hands, all dimpled across the knuckles.

"Carl wanted to tell. He said, 'Let's tell people I was a scoundrel—and stand up to it.' And I said, 'Carl, I'll die first!' And I will, Miss Lydia. I'll die rather than have it known. Nobody must know—ever."

Miss Lydia shook her head. "Somebody besides me must know." Then very faintly she said, "*I'll* tell your father." There was panic in her voice, but Mary's voice, from behind the dimpled hands, was shrill with panic:

"You mustn't! Oh, you promised not to tell!"

Miss Lydia went on, quietly, "He and I will decide what to do."

"No, no!" Mary said. "He'll kill Carl!"

"I shouldn't think Carl would mind being killed," said Miss Lydia.

The girl dropped down again on the step.

"Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do—what shall I do? He'll hate me."

"He'll be very, very unhappy," said Miss Lydia; "but he'll know what must be done. I don't. And he'll forgive you."

"He won't forgive Carl! Father never forgives.

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He says so! And if he won't forgive Carl he mustn't forgive me!" She hid her face.

There was a long silence. Then she said, in a whisper, "When will you . . . tell him?"

"To-night."

Again she cringed away. "Not to-night! Please not to-night. Oh, you promised you wouldn't tell! I can't bear— Let me think. I'll write to Carl. No! No! Father *mustn't* know!"

"Listen," said Lydia Sampson; "you must get married right off. You can't wait until December. That's settled. But your father must manage it so nobody will suspect—anything. Understand?"

"I mean to do that, anyway, but—"

"Unless you tell a great many small stories," said little, truthful Miss Lydia, "you can't manage it; but your father will just tell one big story, about business or something. Gentlemen can always tell stories about business, and you can't find 'em out. The way we do about headaches. Mr. Smith will say business makes it necessary for him to hurry the wedding up so he can go away to—any place. See?"

Mary saw, but she shook her head. "He'll kill Carl," she said again.

"No, he won't," said Miss Lydia, "because then everything would come out; and besides, he'd get hanged."

Again there was a long silence; then Mary said, suddenly, violently:

"Well—*tell him.*"

"Oh, my!" said Miss Lydia, trembling, "my! my!"

But she got up, took the child's soft shrinking hand, and together in the hazy silence of the summer

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night they walked—Miss Lydia hurrying forward, Mary holding back—between the iron gates and up the driveway to the great house.

Talk about facing the cannon's mouth! When Miss Sampson came into the new Mr. Smith's library he was sitting in a circle of lamplight at his big table, writing and smoking. He looked up at her with a resigned shrug. "Wants something done to her confounded house!" he thought. But he put down his cigar, got on his feet, and said, in his genial, wealthy way:

"Well, my good neighbor! How are you?"

Miss Lydia could only gasp, "Mr. Smith—" (there was a faint movement outside the library door and she knew Mary was listening). "Mr. Smith—"

"Sit down, sit down!" he said. "I am afraid you are troubled about something?"

She sat down on the extreme edge of a chair, and he stood in front of her, stroking his white beard and looking at her, amused and bored, and very rich—but not unkind.

"Mr. Smith—" she faltered. She swallowed two or three times, and squeezed her hands together; then, brokenly, but with almost no circumlocution, she told him. . . .

There was a terrible scene in that handsome, shadowy, lamplit room. Miss Lydia emerged from it white and trembling; she fairly ran back to her own gate, stumbled up the mossy brick path to her front door, burst into her unlighted house, then locked the door and bolted it, and fell in a small shaking heap against it, as if it barred out the loud anger and shame which

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she had left behind her in the great house among the trees.

While Mary had crouched in the hall, her ear against the keyhole, Miss Lydia Sampson had held that blazing-eyed old man to common sense. No, he must *not* carry the girl to Mercer the next day, and take the hound by the throat, and marry them out of hand. No, he must *not* summon the scoundrel to Old Chester and send for Doctor Lavendar. No, he must *not* have a private wedding. . . . "They must be married in church and have white ribbons up the aisle," gasped Miss Lydia, "and—and rice. Don't you understand? And it isn't nice, Mr. Smith, to use such language before ladies."

It was twelve o'clock when Miss Lydia, in her dark entry, went over in her own mind the "language" which had been used; all he had vowed he would do, and all she had declared he should not do, and all Mary (called in from the hall) had retorted as to the cruel things that had been done to her and Carl "which had just driven them *wild!*" And then the curious rage with which Mr. Smith had turned upon his daughter when she cried out, "Father, make her promise not to tell!" At that the new Mr. Smith's anger touched a really noble note:

"What! Insult this lady by asking for a 'promise'? Good God! madam," he said, turning to Miss Sampson, "is this girl *mine*, to offer such an affront to a friend?"

At which Miss Lydia felt, just for an instant, that he *was* nice. But the next moment the thought of his fury at Mary made her feel sick. Remembering it now, she said to herself, "It was awful in him to show

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his teeth that way, and to call Mary—*that*.” And again, “It wasn’t gentlemanly in him to use an indelicate word about the baby.” Miss Lydia’s mind refused to repeat these two words, used by the new Mr. Smith. The dreadfulness of them made her forget his momentary chivalry for her. “Mary is only a child,” she said to herself; “and as for the baby, I’ll take care of the little thing; I won’t let it know that its own grandfather called it a — No, it wasn’t nice in Mr. Smith to say such words before a young lady like Mary or before me, either, though I’m a good deal older than Mary. I’m glad I told him so!” (Miss Lydia telling Zeus he wasn’t “nice”!)

This September midnight was the first Secret which pounced upon Miss Lydia. The next was the new Mr. Smith’s short and terrible interview with his prospective son-in-law: “After you marry her, you are never to set foot in this town.” Then his order to his daughter: “Nor you, either, unless you come without that scoundrel. And there are to be no letters to or from Miss Sampson, understand that! I am not going to have people putting two and two together.”

Certainly no such mental arithmetic took place at the very gay Smith wedding in the second week in September—a wedding with white ribbons up the aisle! Yes, and a reception at the big house! and rice! and old slippers!

But when the gayety was over, and the bride and groom drove off in great state, Miss Lydia waved to them from her front door, and then stood looking after the carriage with strange pitifulness in her face. How much they had missed, these two who, instead of

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the joy and wonder and mystery of going away together into their new world, were driving off, scarcely speaking to each other, tasting on their young lips the stale bitterness of stolen fruit! After the carriage was out of sight Miss Lydia walked down the road to the rectory, carrying, as was the habit of her exasperatingly generous poverty when calling on her friends, a present, a tumbler of currant jelly for Doctor Lavendar. But when the old man remonstrated, she did not, as usual, begin to excuse herself. She only said, point-blank:

"Doctor Lavendar, is it ever right to tell lies to save other people?"

Doctor Lavendar, jingling the happy bridegroom's two gold pieces in his pocket, said: "What? What?"

"Not to save yourself," said Miss Lydia; "I know you can't tell lies to save yourself."

Doctor Lavendar stopped jingling his gold pieces and frowned; then he said: "Miss Lydia, the truth about ourselves is the only safe way to live. If other folks want to be safe let them tell their own truths. It doesn't often help them for us to do it for 'em. My own principle has been not to tell a lie about other folks' affairs, but to reserve the truth. Understand?"

"I think I do," said Miss Lydia, faintly, "but it's difficult."

Doctor Lavendar looked at his two gold pieces thoughtfully. "Lydia," he said, "it's like walking on a tight rope." Then he chuckled, dismissed the subject, and spread out his eagles on the table. "Look at 'em! Aren't they pretty? You see how glad

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Mary's young man was to get her. I'll go halves with you!"

Her recoil as he handed her one of the gold pieces made him give her a keen look; but all she said was: "Oh *no!* I wouldn't touch it!" Then she seemed to get herself together: "I don't need it, thank you, sir," she said.

When she went away Doctor Lavendar, looking after her, thrust out his lower lip. "*Lydia* not 'need' an eagle?" he said. "How long since?" And after a while he added, "Now, what on earth—?"

Old Chester, too, said, "What on earth—?" when, in December, Miss Lydia turned the key in her front door and, with her carpetbag and bandbox, took the morning stage for Mercer.

And we said it again, a few weeks later, when Mrs. Barkley received a letter in which Miss Lydia said she had been visiting friends in Indiana and had been asked by them to take care of a beautiful baby boy, and she was bringing him home with her, and she hoped Mrs. Barkley would give her some advice about taking care of babies, for she was afraid she didn't know much—("'*Much*'?" Mrs. Barkley snorted. "She knows as much about babies as a wildcat knows about tatting!")—and she was, as ever, Mrs. Barkley's affectionate Lyddy.

The effect of this letter upon Old Chester can be imagined. Mrs. Drayton said, "What I would like to know is, *whose baby is it?*"

Mrs. Barkley said in a deep bass: "Where will Lyddy get the money to take care of it? As for advising her, I advise her to leave it on the doorstep of its blood relations!"

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Doctor Lavendar said: "Ho, hum! Do you remember what the new Mr. Smith said about her when she gave her party? Well, I agree with him!" Which (if you recall Mr. Smith's exact words) was really a shocking thing for a minister of the gospel to say!

Mrs. William King said, firmly, that she called it murder, to intrust a child to Miss Lydia Sampson. "She'll hold it upside down and never know the difference," said Mrs. King; and then, like everybody else, she asked Mrs. Drayton's question "Whose baby is it?"

There were many answers, mostly to the effect that Lydia was so scatterbrained—as witness her "party," and her blue-silk dress, and her broken engagements, etc., etc., that she was perfectly capable of letting anybody shove a foundling into her arms! Mrs. Drayton's own answer to her question was that the whole thing looked queer—"not that I would imply anything against poor Lydia's character, but it looks *queer*; and if you count back—"

Miss Lydia's reply—for of course the question was asked her as soon as she and the baby, and the band-box and the carpetbag got off the stage one March afternoon—Miss Lydia's answer was brief:

"A friend's."

She did emerge from her secrecy far enough to say to Mrs. Barkley that she was to receive "an honorarium" for the support of the little darling. "Of course I won't spend a cent of it on myself," she added, simply.

"Is it a child of shame?" said Mrs. Barkley, sternly.

Miss Lydia's shocked face and upraised protesting

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hands, answered her: "My baby's parents were married persons! After they—passed on, a friend of theirs intrusted the child to me."

"When did they die?"

Miss Lydia reflected. "I didn't ask the date."

"Well, considering the child's age, the mother's death couldn't have been very long ago," Mrs. Barkley said, dryly.

And Miss Lydia said, in a surprised way, as if it had just occurred to her: "Why, no, of course not! It was an accident," she added.

"For the mother?"

"For both parents," said Miss Sampson, firmly. And that was all Old Chester got out of her.

"Well," said Mrs. Drayton, "I am always charitable, but uncharitable persons might wonder. . . . It was last May, you know, that that Rives man deserted Lydia at the altar."

"Only fool persons would 'wonder' anything like that about Lydia Sampson!" said Mrs. Barkley, fiercely. . . . But even in Old Chester there were two or three fools, so for their especial benefit Mrs. Barkley, who had her own views about Miss Sampson's wisdom in undertaking the care of a baby, but who would not let that Drayton female speak against her, spread abroad the information that Miss Lydia's baby's parents, who had lived out West, had both been killed at the same time in an accident.

"What kind?"

"Carriage, I believe," said Mrs. Barkley; "but they left sufficient money to support the child. So," she added, "Old Chester need have no further anxiety about Lydia's poverty. Their names? Oh—Smith."

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She had the presence of mind to tell Lydia she had named the baby, and though Miss Lydia gave a little start—for she had thought of some more distinguished name for her charge—"Smith," and the Western parents and the carriage accident passed into history.

CHAPTER II

DURING the first year that the "Smith" baby lived outside the brick wall of Mr. Smith's place, the iron gates of the driveway were not opened, because business obliged Mr. Smith to be in Europe. (Oh, said Old Chester, so that was why Mary's wedding had to be hurried up?) When he returned to his native land he never, as he drove past, looked at the youngster playing in Miss Lydia's dooryard. Then once Johnny (he was three years old) ran after his ball almost under the feet of the Smith horses, and as he was pulled from between the wheels his grandfather couldn't help seeing him.

"Don't do that tomfool thing again!" the old man bellowed, and Johnny, clasping his recovered ball, grinned at him.

"He sinks Johnny 'f'aid," the little fellow told Miss Lydia.

A month or two afterward Johnny threw a stone at the victoria and involuntarily Mr. Smith glanced in the direction from which it came. But, of course, human nature being like story books, he did finally notice his grandson. At intervals he spoke to Miss Lydia, and when Johnny was six years old he even stopped one day long enough to give the child a quarter. Mr. Smith had aged very much after his daughter's marriage—and no wonder, Old Chester said, for

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he must be lonely in that big house—and Mary never coming to see him! Such behavior on the part of a daughter puzzled Old Chester. We couldn't understand it—unless it was that Mr. Smith didn't get along with his son-in-law? And Mary, of course, didn't visit her father because a dutiful wife always agrees with her husband! A sentiment which places Old Chester chronologically.

The day that Mr. Smith bestowed the quarter upon his grandson he spoke of his daughter's "dutifulness" to Miss Lydia. Driving toward his house, he overtook two trudging figures, passed them by a rod or two, then called to the coachman to stop. "I'll walk," he said briefly, and waited in the dust of his receding carriage until Miss Lydia and her boy reached him. Johnny was trudging along, pulling his express wagon, which was full of apples picked up on the path below an apple tree that leaned over the girdling wall of the Smith place.

As Miss Lydia approached her landlord, her heart came up in her throat; it always did when she saw him, because she remembered the Olympian thunders he had loosed on that awful night six years ago.

"How do?" said Mr. Smith. His dark eyes under bristling, snow-white eyebrows blazed at her. He didn't notice the little boy.

"How do you do?" said Miss Lydia, in a small voice. She looked tousled and breathless and rather spotted, and so little that Mr. Smith must have felt he could blow her away if he wanted to. Apparently he didn't want to. He only said:

"You—ah, never hear from—ah, my daughter, I suppose, Miss Sampson?"

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"No, sir," said Miss Lydia.

"She doesn't care to visit me without her husband, and I won't have him under my roof!" His lip lifted for an instant and showed his teeth. "I see her when I go to Philadelphia, and she writes me duty letters occasionally, but she never mentions—"

"Doesn't she?" said Miss Lydia.

"I don't, either. But I just want to say that if you ever need any—ah, extra—"

"I don't, thank you."

Then, reluctantly, the flashing black eyes looked down at Johnny. "Doesn't resemble—anybody? Well, young man!"

"Say, 'How do you do?' Johnny," Miss Lydia commanded, faintly.

"How do?" Johnny said, impatiently. He was looking over his apples, and discovering some bruised ones, frowned and threw them away.

"Where did you get your apples?" said Mr. Smith.

"On the road," said Johnny; "they ain't yours when they drop on the road."

"Say 'aren't,' Johnny," said Miss Lydia. "It isn't nice to say 'ain't.'"

"Why aren't they mine?" said the old man. He was towering up above the two little figures, his feet wide apart, his hands behind him, switching his cane back and forth like a tail.

"'Cause I've got 'em," Johnny explained, briefly.

"Ha! The nine-tenths of the Law! You'll be a lawyer, sir!" his grandfather said. "Suppose I say, 'Give me some?'"

"I won't," said Johnny.

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"Oh, you won't, eh? You'll be a politician!" Mr. Smith said.

"It isn't right to say, 'I won't,'" Miss Lydia corrected Johnny, panting.

Mr. Smith did not notice her nervousness; the boy's attitude, legs wide apart, hands behind him, clutching the tongue of his express wagon, held his eye. "He's like me!" he thought, with a thrill.

"Isn't it right to say, 'I won't say I won't'?" Johnny countered.

"Jesuit!" Mr. Smith said, chuckling. "The church is the place for him, Miss Sampson."

"Anyway," Johnny said, crossly, "*I will not* give any of my apples back. They're mine."

"How do you make that out?" said Mr. Smith. (And in an undertone to Miss Lydia, "No fool, eh?")

"Because I picked 'em up," said Johnny.

"Well, here's a quarter," said his grandfather, putting his hand in his pocket.

Johnny took the coin with an air of satisfaction, but even as he slid it into his pocket he took it out again.

"Looky here," he said. "I thought I'd buy a pony with it, but I don't mind paying you for your apples—" And he held out the quarter.

Mr. Smith laughed as he had not laughed for a long time. "You're a judge of horseflesh!" he said, and walked off, switching his tail behind him.

The story-book plot should begin here—the rich grandfather meets the unacknowledged grandchild, loves him, and makes him his heir—and, of course, incidentally, showers his largess upon the poor and virtuous lady who has cared for the little foundling;

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so everybody lives happy and dies wealthy. This intelligent arrangement of fiction might have been carried out if only Miss Lydia had behaved differently! But about two years later her behavior—

“She’s put a spoke in my wheel!” Mr. Smith told himself, blankly. It was when Johnny was eight that the spoke blocked the grandfather’s progress. . . . He had gradually grown to know the boy very well, and, after much backing and filling in his own mind, decided to adopt him. He did not reach this decision easily, for there were risks in such an arrangement; resemblances might develop, and people might put two and two together! However, each time he decided that the risk was too great, a glimpse of Johnny—stealing a ride by hanging on behind his grandfather’s victoria, or going in swimming in deeper water than some of the older boys were willing to essay, or, once, blacking another boy’s eye—such a glimpse of his own flesh and blood gave him courage. Courage gained the day when his grandson had scarlet fever and William King, meeting him after a call at Miss Lydia’s, happened to say that Johnny was a pretty sick child. The new Mr. Smith felt his heart under his spreading white beard contract sharply.

“Sick! Very sick? Good God! the wet hen won’t know how to take care of him!” His alarm was so obvious that Doctor King looked at him in surprise.

“You are fond of the little fellow?”

“Oh, I see him playing around my gate,” Mr. Smith said, and walked off quickly, lest he should find himself urging more advice, or a nurse, or what not. “King would wonder what earthly difference it could make to me!” he said to himself, in a panic of secrecy.

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It made enough difference to cause him to write to his daughter: "I hear the child is very sick and may die. Congratulations to Robertson."

Mary, reading the cruel words and never guessing the anxiety which had dictated them, grew white with anger. "I will never forgive father!" she said to herself, and went over to her husband and put her soft hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

"Carl," she said, "the—the little boy is sick"; his questioning look made her add cynically, "Oh, he'll get well"—but she must have felt some unspoken recoil in her husband, for she cried out, in quick denial, "Of course I don't *want* anything to—to happen to him!"

They did not speak of Johnny's illness for two or three days; then Mary said, "If anything had happened, we should have heard by this time?"

And Carl said, "Oh, of course."

When Johnny was well again his grandfather's fear that Doctor King might "wonder," ebbed. "It's safe enough to take him," he said to himself; "he doesn't look like—either of 'em! If I adopt him I can see that he's properly educated—and it will scare Robertson to death!" he added, viciously, and showed his teeth. He even discussed adopting his grandchild with Doctor Lavendar:

"Mary hasn't done her duty," he said. "I've no grandchildren! I've a great mind to adopt some youngster. I'm fond of children."

"Good idea," said Doctor Lavendar.

"I've taken a fancy to that little rascal who lives just at my gate. Bright youngster. Not a cowardly streak in him! Quick-tempered, I'm afraid. But I

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never blame anybody for that! I've thought, once or twice, that I'd adopt him."

"And Miss Lydia, too?" Doctor Lavendar inquired mildly.

"Oh, I should look after her, of course," said Mr. Smith. But it was still another six months before he really made up his mind. "I'll do it!" he said to himself. "But I suppose," he reflected, "I ought to tell Mary—and the skunk."

He went on to Philadelphia for the purpose of telling Mary, but he did it when Carl was not present.

Mary blenched. "Father, *don't!* People might—"

"Damn people! I like the boy. You're a coward, Mary, and so is—Robertson."

"No! He isn't! Carl isn't. I am."

"I won't compromise you," he ended, contemptuously. "Tell Robertson I mean to do it. If he has anything to say he can say it in a letter." Then he kissed her perfunctorily and said, "Goo'-by—goo'-by," and took the night train for Mercer.

He lost no time when he got back to Old Chester in putting his plan through. The very next afternoon, knowing that Johnny would be at Doctor Lavendar's Collect Class, he called on Miss Lydia. Miss Sampson's little house was more comfortable than it used to be; the quarterly check which came from "some one" patched up leaky roofs, and bought a new carpet, and did one or two other things; but it did not procure any luxuries, either for Johnny or for herself, and it never made Miss Lydia look like anything but a small, bedraggled bird; her black frizette still got crooked and dipped over one soft blue eye, and she was generally shabby—except on the rare occasions

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when she wore the blue silk—and her parlor always looked as if a wind had blown through it. “I wouldn’t *touch* their money for myself!” she used to think; and saved every cent to give to Johnny when he grew up.

Into her helter-skelter house came, on this Saturday afternoon, her landlord. He had knocked on her front door with the gold head of his cane, and when she opened it he had said, “How do? How do?” and walked ahead of her into her little parlor. It was so little and he was so big that he seemed to fill the room.

Miss Lydia said, in a fluttered voice, “How do you do?”

“Miss Sampson,” he said—he had seated himself in a chair that creaked under his ruddy bulk and he put both hands on the top of his cane; his black eyes were friendly and amused—“I’ve had it in mind for some time to have a little talk with you.”

“Yes, sir,” said Miss Lydia.

“I need not go back to—to a painful experience that we both remember.”

Miss Lydia put her head on one side in a puzzled way, as if her memory had failed her.

“You will know that I appreciated your attitude at that time. I appreciated it deeply.”

Miss Lydia rolled her handkerchief into a wabby lamplighter; she seemed to have nothing to say.

“I have come here now, not merely to tell you this, but to add that I intend to relieve you of the care of—ah, the little boy.”

Miss Lydia was silent.

“There are things I should like to give him. He says he wants a pony. And I mean to educate him.

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It would seem strange to do this, as an outsider. It might cause—ah, speculation. So I am going to take him—adopt him.”

“Any grandfather would want to,” said Lydia Sampson.

Mr. Smith raised his bushy eyebrows. “Well, we won’t put it on *that* ground. But I like the boy, though I hear he gets into fights; I’m afraid he has the devil of a temper,” said Mr. Smith, chuckling proudly. “But I’ve watched him, and he’s no coward and no fool, either. In fact, I hear that he is a wonder mathematically. God knows where he got his brains! Well, I am going to adopt him. But that will make no difference in your income. That is assured to you as long as you live. I am indebted to you, Miss Sampson. Profoundly indebted.”

“Not at all,” said Miss Lydia.

“I shall have a governess for him,” said Mr. Smith; “but I hope you will not be too much occupied”—his voice was very genial, and as he spoke he bore down hard on his cane and began to struggle to his feet—“not too much occupied to keep a friendly eye upon him.” He was standing now, a rather Jove-like figure, before whom Miss Lydia looked really like a little brown grasshopper. “Yes, I trust you will not lose your interest in him,” he ended.

“I won’t,” she said, faintly.

“I have made all the arrangements,” said Johnny’s grandfather. “I simply told—ah, the people who know about him, that I was going to take him.” He was standing, switching his cane behind him; it hit an encroaching table leg and he apologized profusely. “Mary was badly scared. As if I could not manage a

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thing like that! I like to scare *him*”—the new Mr. Smith lifted his upper lip, and his teeth gleamed—“but, of course, I told her not to worry. Well, I hope you will see him frequently.”

“I shall,” said Miss Lydia.

“Of course you and I must tell the same story as to his antecedents. So if you will let me know how you have accounted for him, I’ll be a very good parrot!”

“I haven’t told any stories. I just let people call him Smith, and I just said—to Johnny, and everybody—that I was a friend of his mother’s. That’s true, you know.”

“It is true, madam; it is, indeed!” said Mary’s father. He bowed with grave courtliness. “There was never a better friend than you, Miss Sampson.”

“I’ve been very careful not to tell anything that wasn’t true,” said Miss Lydia. “I told Johnny his father and mother had lived out West; they did, you know, for four months. Johnny began to ask questions when he was only five; he said he wished *he* had a mother like other little boys. I had to tell him something, so I told him her name had been Norton. That is true, you know. Mary’s middle name is Norton. And I said I didn’t know of any cousins or uncles; and that’s true. And I said ‘I had been told’ that his father and mother had been killed in a carriage accident. I was told so; people made it up,” said Miss Lydia, simply, “so I just let ’em. I never said his parents had died that way. Well, it made Johnny cry. He used to say: ‘Poor mamma! Poor mamma!’ I haven’t told what you’d call lies; I have only reserved the truth.”

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"Pathetic, his 'wanting' a mother," said Mr. Smith. "Damn my son-in-law! Excuse me, madam."

"It would be nice if you would forgive him," Miss Lydia suggested, timidly.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I never forgive. . . . Well, I will keep up the geographical fiction and the runaway horses. And now I must not detain you further. I will take the boy to-morrow."

He put out his big hand, and Miss Lydia, putting her little one into it, said:

"Who is going to adopt him?"

"Who?" said Mr. Smith. "Why, I! Who did you suppose was going to—Robertson? My dear Miss Sampson, reassure yourself on that point! That hound shall never get hold of him!"

"Of course," Miss Lydia agreed, nodding, "Johnny's parents, or his grandfather, have a right to him."

Mr. Smith was just leaving the room, but he paused on the threshold and flung a careless word back to her: "His parents could never take him. The thing would come out."

"If his *grandfather* takes him it will come out," said Miss Lydia, following him into the hall.

"Yes, but his 'grandfather' won't take him," the old man said, with a grunt of amusement; "it is 'Mr. Smith' who is going to do that."

"'Mr. Smith' can't."

Her caller turned and stared at her blankly.

"His 'grandfather' can have him," said Miss Lydia. "*What!*"

"His relations can have Johnny."

"But I—"

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"If you are a relation," Miss Lydia said—her voice was only a little whisper—"you can have him."

They stood there in the hall, the big man, and the small, battling gambler of a woman, who was staking her most precious possession—a disowned child—on the chance that the pride of the man would outweigh his desire for ownership. Their eyes—misty, frightened blue, and flashing black—seemed to meet and clash. "He won't dare," she was saying to herself, her heart pounding in her throat. And Johnny's grandfather was saying to himself, very softly, "The devil!" He bent a little, as an elephant might stoop to scrutinize a grasshopper which was trying to block his way, and looked at her. Then he roared with laughter.

"Well, upon my word!" he said. He put his cane under his arm, fumbled for his handkerchief, and wiped his eyes. "Miss Sampson," he said, "you are a bully. And you would be a highly successful blackmailer. But you are no coward; I'll say that for you. You are a damned game little party! I'll see to you, ma'am, I'll see to you!—*and I'll get the child.* But I like you. Damned if I don't!"

CHAPTER III

THE gambler went on her trembling legs back to her cluttered parlor and sat down, panting and pallid. The throw of the dice had been in her favor!

It was curious that she had no misgiving as to what she was doing in thus closing the door of opportunity to Johnny—for of course; the new Mr. Smith's protection would mean every sort of material opportunity for him! If it had been his "grandfather's" protection which had been offered, perhaps she might have hesitated, for that would have meant material opportunity plus a love great enough to tell the truth; and Miss Lydia's own love—which was but a spiritual opportunity—could not compete with that! As it was, she tested opportunities by saying, "His *grandfather* can have him."

Of course it was just her old method of choosing the better part. . . . All her life this gallant, timid woman had weighed values. She had weighed the reputation of being a jilt as against marriage to a man she did not respect—and she found the temporary notoriety of the first lighter than the lifelong burden of the second. She weighed values again, when she put her hundred dollars' worth of generosity on one side of the scales, and William's meanness on the other—and when generosity kicked the beam she was glad to be jilted. She had even

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weighed the painful unrealities of concealed poverty as against open shabbiness, and she saw that a dress she couldn't afford was a greater load to carry than the consciousness of the spot on her old skirt—especially as the spot was glorified by the memory of a friend's hospitality!

So now, when the new Mr. Smith considered adopting her boy, this simple soul weighed values for Johnny: Mr. Smith—or Johnny's grandfather? Pride—or love? And pride outweighed love. Miss Lydia put her hands over her face and prayed aloud: "God, keep him proud, so I can keep Johnny!"

Apparently God did, for it was only "Mr. Smith" who made further efforts to get her child. They were very determined efforts. Miss Lydia's landlord saw her again, and urged. She met what he had to say with a speechless obstinacy which made him extremely angry. When he saw her a third time he offered her an extraordinary increase in the honorarium—for which he had the grace five minutes later to apologize. He saw her once more, and threatened he would "take" Johnny, anyhow!

"How?" said poor, shaking Miss Lydia. Then, as a last resort, he sent his lawyer to her, which scared her almost to death. But the interview produced, for Mr. Smith, nothing except legal assurance that he could doubtless secure the person of his grandson by appealing to the courts *in the character of a grandfather*—for Miss Lydia had never taken out papers for adoption.

"The lady has the 'nine-tenths of the law,'" said Mr. Smith's legal adviser, who had been consulted, first, as to a hypothetical case, and then told the facts. "The

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other one-tenth won't secure a child whom you don't claim as a relative. And the law means publicity."

"The hussy!" said Mr. Smith. "She's put a spoke in my wheel."

"She has," said the lawyer, and grinned behind his hand.

Mr. Smith glared at him. "That little wet hen!"

Well! after one or two more efforts, he swallowed his defeat, and, though for nearly a year he would not recognize Miss Lydia when he met her in the street, he made fast friends with the freckled, very pugnacious boy at his gates. He used to stop and speak to him and tell him to say his multiplication table, and then give him a quarter and walk off, greatly diverted. Sometimes when he saw his daughter in Philadelphia, he would tell her, sardonically, that "that child" had more brains than his father and mother put together!

"Not than his father," poor, cowering Mary would protest. And her father, looking at her with unforgiving eyes, would say, "I wish I owned him. (I like to scare 'em!" he added to himself.) He certainly scared Mary! Scared her, and made her feel a strange anger, because her father had something which did not belong to him; "after all, the boy is *ours*," she told her husband. She always went to bed with a headache after one of Mr. Smith's visits. As for Carl, his face would grow crimson with helpless mortification under the gibes of his father-in-law as Mary repeated them to him.

Once, when she told him that her father said he had "taken the boy home to supper with him," he swore under his breath, and she agreed, hurriedly:

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"Father was simply mad to notice him! People will guess—"

But Carl broke in: "Oh, I didn't mean *that*. No one would ever suspect anything. I meant, what right has *he* to get fond of—the boy?"

"Not the slightest!" Mary said. And they neither of them knew that they were beginning to be jealous.

The occasion of Mr. Smith's "madness" was one winter afternoon when, meeting Johnny in the road, he took him into his carriage, then sent word to Miss Lydia that he was keeping the child to supper. He put him in a big chair at the other end of the table and baited him with questions, and roared with laughter and pride at his replies. Also, he gave him good advice, as a grandfather should:

"I hear you are a bad boy and get into fights. Never fight, sir, never fight! But if you do fight, lick your man."

"Yes, sir," said Johnny.

"And don't be afraid to tackle a bigger man than yourself. Only cowards are afraid to do that!"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny.

"But of course I don't approve of fighting. Only bad boys fight. Remember that!"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny, and scraped his plate loudly to attract the attention of old Alfred, his grandfather's man, who, familiar and friendly from thirty years' service, said, as he brought the desired flannel cakes, "The little man holds his fork just as you do, sir!" At which Mr. Smith stopped laughing, and said:

"Miss Sampson ought to teach him better manners."

He did not invite Johnny to supper again, which

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would have been a relief to Mary if she had known it; and was just as well, anyhow, for Miss Lydia, quaking at her own supper table (while Johnny was "holding his fork" in his grandfather's fashion!) had said to herself, "I'll tell him to say, 'No, thank you, sir,' if Mr. Smith ever asks him again."

It was about this time that Miss Lydia's landlord softened toward her sufficiently to bow to her as he passed her house. Once he even stopped her in the street to ask the particulars of one of Johnny's escapades: It appeared that a boy—one of the Mack boys, as it happened, who was always in hot water in Old Chester—got the credit of a smashed sash in Mr. Steele's greenhouse, which was really Johnny's doing; and in spite of sniffing denials, the (for once) innocent Mack boy was just about to get what the irate owner of the sash called a "walloping," when Johnny Smith, breathless, and mad as a hatter, rushed into the greenhouse to say, "It was me done it!"—upon which the richly deserved walloping was handed over to the real culprit. Later, for some private grudge, Johnny paid it all back to young Mack, but for the moment—"I take my medicine," said Johnny, showing his teeth. "I don't hide behind another feller. But you bet I'll smash Andy Steele's hotbed sashes every chance I get!" Poor little Miss Lydia was frightened to death at such a wicked remark, and prayed that God would please forgive Johnny; and she was very bewildered to have Mr. Smith, listening to this dreadful story, chuckle with delight: "He'll come to a bad end, the scoundrel! Tell him I say I expect he'll be hanged. I'll give him a quarter for every pane he broke!" After this interview Mr. Smith

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used to call on Miss Lydia occasionally just to inquire what was Johnny's latest crime, and once he invited his tenant to supper, "with your young scamp," his invitation ran. She went, and wore her blue silk, and sat on the edge of her chair, watching the grandfather and grandson, while the vein on her thin temple throbbed with fright. But it took another year of longing for his own flesh and blood before the new Mr. Smith reached an amazing, though temporary, decision.

"I'll have him," he said to himself; "I *will* have him! I'll swallow the wet hen, if I can't get him any other way. I'll—I'll marry the woman." . . . But he hesitated for still another month or two, for, though he wanted his grandson, he did not hanker to make a fool of himself; and a rich man in the late seventies who marries an impecunious spinster in the early fifties looks rather like a fool.

But when he finally reached the point of swallowing Miss Lydia he lost no time in walking out from his iron gates one fine afternoon and banging on her front door with his stick. When she opened it he announced that he had something he wanted to say. In his own mind, the words he proposed to speak were to this effect: "I'm going to marry you—to get the boy." To be sure, he would not express it just that way—one has to go round Robin Hood's barn in talking to females! So he began:

"I have been planning more comfortable quarters for you, ma'am, than this house. More suitable quarters for my—for the boy; and I—" Then he stopped. Somehow or other, looking at Miss Lydia, sitting there so small and frightened and brave, he

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was suddenly ashamed. He could not offer this gallant soul the indignity of a bribe! "If I can't get the boy by fair means, I won't by foul," he told himself; so instead of offering himself, he talked about the weather; "and—and I want you to know that Johnny shall be put down for something handsome in my will. It won't be suspicious. Everybody in Old Chester knows that I like him—living here at my gates; though he has the devil of a temper! Bad thing. Very bad thing. He should control it. I've always controlled mine."

Miss Lydia felt a sudden wave of pity; he was so helpless, and she was so powerful—and so lucky! But all she said, in her breathless voice, was that he "was very kind—about the will."

Johnny's grandfather, looking into her sweet, blue eyes, suddenly said—and with no thought whatever of Johnny—"I wish I was twenty years younger!" The wistful genuineness of that was the nearest he came to asking her to marry him. He went home feeling as he walked up to his great, empty house, very old and forlorn, and yet relieved that he had not offered an affront to Miss Lydia nor, incidentally, made a fool of himself. Then he thought with the old, hot anger, of Carl Robertson, and with a dreary impatience, of his daughter; it was their doing that he couldn't own his own grandson! "Well, the boy shall have his grandfather's money," he said to himself, stumbling a little as he went up the flight of granite steps to his front door. "Every bit of it! I don't care whether people think things or not. Damn people. Let 'em think! What difference does it make? Robertson can go to hell." He was so dulled

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that, for the moment, he forgot that if Robertson went to hell Mary would have to go, too. Later that night his tired mind cleared, and he knew it wouldn't do to let Johnny have his "grandfather's" money, and that even Mr. Smith's money must be bestowed with caution.

"I'll leave a bequest that won't compromise Mary, but she and Robertson must somehow do the rest. I'll send for her next week and tell her what to do; and then I'll fix up a codicil."

But next week he said *next* week; and after that he thought, listlessly, that he wasn't equal to seeing her. "She's fond of Robertson—I can't stand that! I never forgive."

So he didn't send for his daughter. But a week later William King did. . . .

"I suppose I've got to go?" Mary told her husband, looking up from the doctor's telegram with scared eyes.

"It wouldn't be decent not to," he said.

"But *he* is right there, by the gate! I might see him. Oh—I don't dare!"

"Women are queer," Johnny's father ruminated. "I should think you'd like to see him. I guess all this mother-love talk is a fairy tale"; then, before she could retort, he put his arms around her. "I didn't mean it, dear! Forgive me. Only, Mary, I get to thinking about him, and I feel as if I'd like to see the little beggar!"

"But how can I 'love' him?" she defended herself, in a smothered voice; "I don't know him."

"Stop and speak to him while you're at your father's," he urged; "and then you will know him."

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"Oh, I couldn't—I couldn't! I'd be afraid to."

"But why? Nobody could possibly suppose—"

"Because," she said, "if I saw him once, *I might want to see him again.*"

Carl frowned with bewilderment, but Johnny's mother began to pace up and down, back and forth—then suddenly flew out of the room and upstairs, to fall, crying, upon her bed.

However, she obeyed Doctor King's summons. The day the stage went jogging and creaking past Miss Lydia's door the lady inside looked straight ahead of her, and some one who saw her said she was very pale—"anxious about her father," Old Chester said, sympathetically. Then Old Chester wondered whether Carl was so unchristian as to refuse to come to see his father-in-law—"on his deathbed!"—or whether old Mr. Smith "on his death bed" was so unchristian as to refuse to see his son-in-law. "What *did* they quarrel about!" Old Chester said. Certainly Mr. Smith had seemed friendly enough to the young man before Mary married him.

When Mary—she was in the early thirties now, and Johnny was thirteen—came into her father's room and sat down beside him, the old man opened his eyes and looked at her.

"How do?" he said, thickly; and then: "Pleasant journey?"

"Yes, father. I hope you are feeling better?"

His eyes closed and he seemed to forget her. Later, looking up at her from the pillows of his great carved rosewood bed—the headboard looked like the Gothic doors of a cathedral—he said, "Tell

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your husband"—he lifted his upper lip and showed his teeth—"to educate him."

Mary said, "Who?"—then could have bitten her tongue out, for of course there was only one "him" for these three people! She gave a frightened glance about the room, but there was no one to hear that betraying pronoun. She said, faintly: "Yes, father. Now try to rest and don't talk. You'll feel better in the morning."

"He hates a coward as much as I do," Mr. Smith mumbled. "And he has brains; doesn't get 'em from you two. Guess he gets 'em from me."

"Father! Please—*please!*" she said, in a terrified whisper. "Somebody might hear."

"They're welcome. Mary . . . he handed me back my own quarter for my own apples. No fool." He gave a grunt of laughter. "He said, 'Twelve times twelve' like lightning—when he was only seven! . . . Last year he took his own licking, though the Mack boy was in for it. . . . I'm going to give him a pony."

After that he seemed to forget her and slept for a while. A day or two later he forgot everything, even Johnny. The last person he remembered, curiously enough, was Miss Lydia Sampson.

It was when he was dying that he said, suddenly opening those marvelous eyes and smiling faintly: "Little wet hen! Damned game little party. Stood right up to me. . . . Wish I'd married her thirteen years ago. Then there'd have been no fuss about my grandson."

"Grandson?" said Doctor King, in a whisper, looking across the bed at Mrs. Robertson. And she whispered back, "He is wandering."

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When Mary's husband arrived for the funeral and for the reading of the will (in which there was nothing "handsome" for Johnny!) the doctor told him of the new Mr. Smith's last words; and Mr. Robertson said, hurriedly, "Delirious, of course."

"I suppose so," said Doctor King.

But when he walked home with Doctor Lavendar, after the funeral, he said, "Have you any idea who Johnny Smith belongs to, Doctor Lavendar?"

"Miss Lydia," said Doctor Lavendar, promptly.

To which William King replied, admiringly, "I have never understood how anybody *could* look as innocent as you, and yet be so chock-full of other people's sins! Wonder if his mother will ever claim him?"

"Wonder if Miss Lydia would give him up if she did?" Doctor Lavendar said.

"She'd have to," William said.

"On the principle that a 'mother is a mother still, the holiest thing alive'?" Doctor Lavendar quoted.

"On the principle of ownership," said William King. "As to a mother being a 'holy thing,' I have never noticed that the mere process of child-bearing produces sanctity."

"William," said Doctor Lavendar, "Mrs. Drayton would say you were indelicate. Also, I believe you know that two and two make four?"

"I have a pretty good head for arithmetic," said William King, "but I only added things up a day or two ago."

CHAPTER IV

AFTER Mr. Smith's death the Robertsons stayed on in Old Chester to close the house. Mary hardly left it, even to walk in the garden behind the encircling brick wall. But she sent her husband on innumerable errands into Old Chester, and when he came back she would say, "Did you see—*him?*?"

And sometimes Johnny's father would say, "Yes." "You didn't speak to him?" she would ask, in a panic.

"Of course not! But he's an attractive boy." Once he added, "Why don't you go and call on Miss Lydia—and see him yourself?"

She caught her soft hands together in terror. "Go to Miss Lydia's? I? Oh, I couldn't! Oh, Carl, don't you see—I *might like him!*"

"You couldn't help it if you saw him."

"That's just it! I don't want to like him. Nothing would induce me to see him."

Yet there came a moment when the urge of maternity was greater than the instinct of secrecy, greater even than the fear of awakening in herself that "liking" which would inevitably mean pain. She and Johnny's father were to leave Old Chester the next day; for a week she had been counting the hours until they would start, and she could turn her back on this gnawing temptation! But when that

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last day came, she vacillated: "I'll just walk down and look at Miss Lydia's house; he might be going in or coming out. No! I won't; he might see me, and think— . . . Oh, I must—I must . . . Oh, I *can't*, I won't!" Yet in the late afternoon she slipped out of the house and went stealthily down the carriage road, and, standing in the shadow of one of the great stone gateposts, stared over at Lydia's open door. As she stood there she heard a sound. Her heart leaped—and fell, shuddering. Just once in her life had she felt that elemental pang; it was when another sound, the little thin cry of birth pierced her ears. Now the sound was of laughter, the shrill, cracking laughter of an adolescent boy. She crept back to the big house, so exhausted that she said to old Alfred, "Tell Mr. Robertson that I have a headache, and am lying down."

Later, when her husband, full of concern at her discomfort, came upstairs to sit on the edge of her bed and ask her how she felt, she told him what had happened.

"I wouldn't see him for anything," she said, gasping; "even his voice just about killed me! Oh, Carl, suppose I were to like him? Oh, what shall I do?—*I don't want to like him.*"

"Why, my dear, it would be all right if you did," he tried to reassure her. "There's no reason why you shouldn't see him once in a while—and like him, too. I like him, though I haven't spoken to him. But I'm going to."

"Oh, Carl, don't—" she besought him.

But he said: "Don't worry. You know I would never do anything rash."

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And the next day he stopped boldly at Miss Lydia's door, and talked about the weather, and gave Johnny a dollar.

"Go downstreet and buy something," he said.

And Johnny said, "Thank you, sir!" and went off, whistling.

"He's a promising boy," Mr. Robertson said, in a low voice.

Miss Lydia was extremely nervous during this five minutes. She had been nervous during the weeks that Mary and Carl were up there in the big house. Suppose they should see just how "promising" Johnny was—and want him?—and say they would take him? Then she would reassure herself: "They can only take their son—and they don't want *him!*" Yet she was infinitely relieved when, the next day, the Smith house was finally closed and the "For Sale or To Let" sign put on the iron gates that shut the graveled driveway from Old Chester's highroad.

"They'll sell the house and never come back," she told herself. And indeed Johnny was a year older, a year more plucky and high-tempered and affectionate, before Miss Lydia had any further cause for uneasiness.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Carl Robertson appeared in town; he came, he said, to make sure that the still unsold Smith house was not getting dilapidated. While he was looking it over he took occasion to tell several people that that boy who lived with the old lady in the house by the gate was an attractive youngster.

"I suppose," said Mr. Robertson, "Mary ought to sell that house to settle the estate, but she says she

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won't turn the old lady out. The little beggar she takes care of seems a nice little chap." Then he said, casually, "Who were his father and mother?"

"That's what nobody knows," some one said; then added, significantly, "Lydia is very secretive." And some one else said, "There is a suspicion that the child is her own."

"Her *own*?" Carl Robertson gaped, open-mouthed. And when he turned his back on this particular gossip his face was darkly red. "Somebody in this town needs a horsewhipping!" he told himself; "God forbid that Miss Sampson knows there are such fools in the world!" He was so angry and ashamed that his half-formed wish to do something for the child crystallized into purpose. But before he made any effort to carry his purpose out he discounted public opinion. "Nothing like truth to throw people off the track," he reflected. So, with the frankness which may be such a perfect screen for lack of candor, he put everybody he met off the track by saying he was going to give Miss Lydia a hand in bringing up that boy of hers.

"Very generous," said Mrs. Barkley, and told Old Chester that the fat Mr. Robertson was an agreeable person, and she did wonder why his father-in-law had not got along with him!

"The reason I spoke of it to Mrs. Barkley," Carl Robertson told Miss Lydia, "was that I knew she'd inform everybody in town. So that if, later on, I want to see the—the boy, once in a while, it won't set people gossiping."

It was the night before he was leaving Old Chester that he said this. They were in Miss Lydia's parlor;

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the door was closed, for Johnny was in the dining room, doing his examples, one leg around the leg of his chair, his tongue out, and breathing heavily: "Farmer Jones sold ten bushels of wheat at—"

"I do want to see more of him," Mr. Robertson said; "and I want Mary to."

"Do you?" said Miss Lydia.

"Well, he's ours, and—"

"He's his father's and mother's," she conceded; "they would naturally want to see him."

"Yes," Carl Robertson said; "but of course we could never do more than that. We could never have him."

Miss Lydia felt her legs trembling, and she put her hands under her black silk apron lest they might tremble, too. "No," she agreed, "I suppose you couldn't."

He nodded. "It would be impossible; people must never suspect—" He stopped through sheer shame at the thought of all the years he had hidden behind this small, scared-looking woman, who had had no place to hide from a ridiculous but pursuing suspicion.

When he got back to Philadelphia and told his wife about the boy, he said, "Some of those old cats in Old Chester actually thought he was—her own child."

"What!"

"Fools. But, Mary, she never betrayed us—that little woman! She never told the truth."

"She never knew it was said."

"God knows, I hope she didn't. . . . We ought to have kept him."

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"Carl! You know we couldn't; it would have been impossible!"

"Well, we cared more for our reputations than for our—son," he said.

For a moment that poignant word startled Mary into silence; then she said, breathlessly: "But, Carl, that isn't common sense! What about—the boy himself? Would it have been a good thing for him that people should know?"

"It might have been a good thing for us," he said; "and it couldn't be any worse for him than it is. Everybody thinks he's illegitimate." He paused, and then he said a really profound thing—for a fat, selfish man. "Mary, I believe that no *real* welfare is ever built on a lie. If it was to do over again I'd stand up to my own cussed folly."

"You don't seem to consider me!" she said, bitterly.

But he only said, slowly, "He's the finest little chap you ever saw."

"Pretty?" she said, forgetting her bitterness.

"Oh, he's a boy, a real boy. Freckled. And when he's mad he shows his teeth, just as your father used to; I saw him in a fight. No; of course he's not 'pretty.'"

"I'd like to see him—if I wasn't afraid to," she said. She was thirty-four now, a sad, idle, rich woman, with only three interests in life: eating and shopping and keeping the Secret which made her cringe whenever she thought of it, which, since the night she heard Johnny laugh, was pretty much all the time. It was the shopping interest that by and by united with the interest of the Secret; it occurred to her that she might give "him" something. She

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would buy him a pair of skates! "But you must send them to him, Carl."

"Why don't you do it yourself?"

"It would look queer. People might—think."

"Well, they 'thought' about that poor little woman."

"Idiots! She's a hundred years old!" Mary said, jealously.

"She wasn't when he was born," her husband said, wearily. He probably loved his wife after a fashion; but since that day when she had flung away the lure of mystery, her mind had ceased to interest him. This was cruel and unjust, but it is male human nature.

"Why don't you get acquainted with the youngster?" he said, yawning.

"*Carl!* You know it wouldn't do. Besides, how could I?"

"We could take the house ourselves next summer. There's some furniture in it still. It would come about naturally enough. And he would be at our gates."

"Oh no—*no!* Maybe he looks like me."

"No, he doesn't. Didn't I tell you he isn't particularly good-looking?"

"Maybe he looks like you?" she objected, simply.

He laughed, and said, "Thank you, my dear!"

But Mary didn't laugh. She got up and stood staring out of the window into the rainy street; "You send him the skates," she said; "you've seen him, so it wouldn't seem queer."

The skates were sent, and Johnny's mother was eager to see Johnny's smudgy and laborious letter acknowledging "Mr. Robertson's kind present."

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"That's a very nice little letter!" she said; "he must be clever, like you. I'll buy some books for him."

That was in January. By April Johnny and his books and his mental arithmetic, and his freckles were almost constantly in her mind. It was about the middle of April that she said to her husband:

"If you haven't a tenant, I suppose we might open father's house for a month? Perhaps being there would be better than—giving presents? If I saw him just once I shouldn't want to give him things."

"I'm afraid you'd want to more than ever," he demurred, which, of course, made her protest:

"Oh no, I shouldn't! Do let's do it!"

"Well," he conceded, in triumphant reluctance—for it was what he had wanted her to say—"if you insist. But I don't believe you'll like it."

So that was how it happened that the weatherworn "For Sale or To Let" sign was taken down, and the rusty iron gates were opened, and the weedy graveled driveway made clean and tidy as it used to be in Johnny's grandfather's time. Johnny himself was immensely interested in all that went on in the way of renovation, and in the beautiful horses that came down before Mr. and Mrs. Robertson arrived.

"Aunty, they must be pretty rich," he said.

"They are," said Miss Lydia.

"I guess if they had a boy they'd give him a pony," Johnny said, sighing.

"Very likely," Miss Lydia told him. And she, too, watched the opening up of the big house with her frightened blue eyes.

"Lydia, you're losing flesh," Mrs. Barkley said in

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an anxious bass. Indeed, all Old Chester was anxious about Miss Sampson's looks that summer. "What *is* the matter?" said Old Chester.

But Miss Lydia, although she really did grow thin, never said what was the matter.

"I do dislike secretiveness!" said Mrs. Drayton; "I call it vulgar."

"I wonder what she calls inquisitiveness?" Doctor Lavendar said when this remark was repeated to him.

Miss Lydia may have been vulgar, but her vulgarity did not save her from terror. When Mary drove past the little house, the Grasshopper's heart was in her mouth! Would Johnny's mother stop?—or would Mrs. Robertson go by? There came, of course, the inevitable day when the mother stopped. . . . It was in June, a day of white clouds racing in a blue sky, and tree tops bending and swaying and locust blossoms showering on the grass. Johnny was engaged in trying to lure his cat out of a pear tree, into which a dog had chased her.

"Stop!" Mary Robertson called to the coachman; then, leaning forward, she tried to speak. Her breath came with a gasp. "Are you the—the boy who lives with Miss Sampson?"

"Yes'm," Johnny said. "Kitty, Kitty!" Then he called: "Aunty! Let's try her with milk!"

Miss Lydia, coming to the door with a saucer of milk, stood for a paralyzed moment, then she said, "How do you do, Mary?"

"You haven't forgotten me?" Mrs. Robertson said.

"Well, no," said Miss Lydia.

"Lovely day," Mary said, breathing quickly; then she waved a trembling hand. "Good-by! Go on,

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Charles." Charles flicked his whip and off she rumbled in the very same old victoria in which her father had rolled by Miss Lydia's door in the September dusk some fifteen years before.

That night Johnny's mother said to her husband, almost in a whisper, "I—spoke to him."

He put a kindly arm around her. "Isn't he as fine a boy as you ever saw?"

After that Mrs. Robertson spoke to Johnny Smith frequently and Miss Lydia continued to lose flesh. The month that Mr. and Mrs. Robertson were to spend in Old Chester lengthened into two—into three. And while they were there wonderful things happened to Johnny in the way of presents—a lathe, a velocipede, a little engine to turn a wheel in the run at the foot of old Mr. Smith's pasture. Also, he and his aunt Lydia were invited to take supper with Mr. and Mrs. Robertson. "We'll have to ask *her*." Johnny's mother had said to Johnny's father, "because it would look queer to have him come by himself. Oh, Carl, I am beginning to hate her!"

"You mustn't, dear; she's good to him."

"I want to be good to him!"

However, Miss Lydia, in her once-turned and twice-made-over blue silk, came and sat at the big table in the new Mr. Smith's dining room. She hardly spoke, but just sat there, the vein on her temple throbbing with fright, and listened to Johnny's mother pouring herself out in fatuous but pathetic flattery and in promises of all sorts of delights.

"Mary, my *dear*!" Carl Robertson protested once; but he felt the pain of the poor, child-hungry woman at the other end of the table.

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When Miss Lydia and Johnny walked home together in the darkness her boy said: "A fellow'd be lucky with a mother like that, wouldn't he? She'd give him everything he wanted. She'd give him a pony," Johnny said.

"Yes," said Miss Lydia, faintly.

"Wish I had a mother who'd gimme a pony," Johnny said, with the brutal honesty of his sex and years.

And Miss Lydia said again, "Yes."

"Maybe Mrs. Robertson 'll gimme one," Johnny said, hopefully; "she's always giving me things!"

However, though Johnny's gratitude consisted of a lively hope of benefits to come, he had some opinions of his own.

"She kisses me," he said to Miss Lydia, wrinkling up his nose. "I don't like kissing ladies."

Poor Mary couldn't help kissing him. The fresh, honest, ugly young face had become more wonderful to her than anything else on earth! But sometimes she looked at him and then at his father, and said to herself, "His eyes are not like Carl's, but his mouth is as Carl's used to be before he wore a beard; but nobody would know it now."

Mr. Robertson looked pleased when she told him, anxiously, that "*it was* showing—the likeness! He has your mouth. And people might—"

"I wish to God I could own him," said Carl Robertson.

"Carl, he wants a pony! Buy one for him."

But Johnny didn't get his pony, because when Mr. Robertson told Miss Lydia he was thinking of buying a horse for his boy, she said:

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"No ; it isn't good for him, please, to have so many things."

"The idea of her interfering!" Mary told her husband.

CHAPTER V

I'M going to have Johnny visit me this winter," Mary said.

This was at the end of the summer, and the prospect of saying good-by to Johnny for almost a year was more than she could bear.

"My dear!" her husband protested, "if you got him under your own roof you wouldn't be able to hold on to yourself! I could, but you couldn't. You'd tell him."

"I wouldn't! Why, I *couldn't*. Of course he can never know. . . . But I'm going to see—that woman, and tell her that I shall have him visit us."

"She'll not permit it."

"'Permit'!" Mary said. "Upon my word! My own child not '*permitted*'!"

"It's hard," Carl said, briefly.

"You want him, too," she said, eagerly; "I can see you do! Think of having him with us for a week! I could go into his room and—and pick up his clothes when he drops them round on the floor, the way boys do." She was breathless at the thought of such happiness. "I'll tell her I'm going to have him come in the Christmas vacation. Oh, Carl!"—her black, heavy eyes suddenly glittered with tears—"I want my baby!"

The words stabbed him; for a moment he felt that

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there was no price too great to pay for comfort for her. "We'll try it," he said, "but we'll have to handle Miss Lydia just right to get her consent to it."

"'Consent'?" she said fiercely. "Carl, I just hate her!" The long-smothered instinct of maternity leaped up and scorched her like flame; she put her dimpled hands over her face and cried.

He tried to tell her that she wasn't just. "After all, dear, we disowned him. Naturally, she feels that he belongs to her."

But she could not be just: "He belongs to *us*! And she prejudices him against us. I know she does. I said to him yesterday that her clothes weren't very fashionable. I just said it for fun; and he said, 'You shut up!'"

"*What!*" Johnny's father said, amused and horrified.

"I believe she likes him to be rude to me," Mary said.

Her jealousy of Miss Lydia had taken the form of suspicion; if Johnny was impertinent, if that shabby Miss Lydia meant more to him than she did—the rich, beneficent, adoring Mrs. Robertson!—it must be because Miss Lydia "influenced" him. It was to counteract that influence that she planned the Christmas visit; if she could have him to herself, even for a week, with all the enjoyments she would give him, she was sure she could rout "that woman" from her place in his heart!

"I sha'n't ask for what is my own," she told Carl; "I'll just say I'm going to take him for the Christmas holidays. She won't dare to say he can't come!"

Yet when she went to tell Miss Lydia that Johnny

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was coming, her certainty that the shabby woman wouldn't "dare," faded.

Miss Lydia was in the kitchen, making cookies for her boy, and when his mother knocked at the front door she could not instantly leave her rolling pin. Mary had not been at that door since the September night when she had crouched, sobbing, on the steps. And now again it was September, and again the evening primroses were opening in the dusk. . . . As she knocked, a breath of their subtle perfume brought back that other dusk, and for an instant she was engulfed in a surge of memory. She felt faint and leaned against the door, waiting for Miss Lydia's little running step in the hall. She could hardly speak when the door opened. "Good—good evening," she said in a whisper.

Miss Lydia, her frightened eyes peering at her caller from under that black frizette, could hardly speak herself. Mary was the one to get herself in hand first. "May I come in, Miss Sampson?"

"Why, yes—" said Miss Lydia, doubtfully, and dusted her floury hands together.

"I came to say," Mary began, following her back to the kitchen, "I came—"

"I'm making cookies for Johnny," Miss Lydia said, briskly, and Mary's soft hands clenched. Why shouldn't *she* be making cookies for Johnny!

"I've got a pan in the oven," said Miss Lydia, "and I've got to watch 'em."

Mary was silent; she sat down by the table, her breath catching in her throat. Miss Lydia did not, apparently, notice the agitation; she bustled about

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and brought her a hot cooky on a cracked plate—and watched her.

"I want—" Mary said, in a trembling voice, and crumbling the cooky with nervous fingers—"I mean, I am going to have Johnny visit me this winter."

"Oh," said Miss Lydia, and sat down

"I'll have him during the holidays."

"No."

"Why not?" Mary said, angrily.

"He'd guess."

"You needn't be afraid of *that*!"

Miss Lydia silently shook her head; instantly Mary's anger turned to fright.

"Oh, Miss Lydia—please! I promise you he shall never have the dimmest idea—why, he *couldn't* have! It wouldn't do, you know. But I want him just to— to look at."

Miss Lydia was pale. She may have been a born gambler, but never had she taken such a chance as this—to give Johnny back, even for a week, to the people who once had thrown him away, but who now were ready to do everything for him, give him anything he wanted!—and a boy wants so many things! "No," she said, "no."

Mary gave a starved cry, then dropped on her knees, clutched at the small, rough, floury hand and tried to kiss it.

"A mother has a claim," she said passionately.

Miss Lydia, pulling her hand away, nodded, "Yes, a mother has."

"Then let him come. Oh, let him come!"

"*Are you his mother?*"

Mary fell back, half sitting on the floor, half kneel-

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ing at Miss Lydia's feet. "What do you mean? You know—"

"Sometimes," said Miss Lydia, "I think *I'm* his mother."

Mary started. "She's crazy!" she thought, scared.

"He is mine," Miss Lydia said, proudly; "some foolish people have even thought he was mine in—in your way."

"Absurd!" Mary said, with a gasp.

"You have never understood love, Mary," Miss Lydia said; "never, from the very beginning." And even as Johnny's mother recoiled at that sword-thrust, she added, her face very white: "But I'll chance it. Yes, if he wants to visit you I'll let him. But I hope you won't hurt him."

"Hurt him? Hurt my own child? He shall have everything!"

"That's what I mean. It may hurt him. He may get to be like you," Miss Lydia said . . . "Oh, my cookies! They are burning!" She pushed Johnny's mother aside—she wanted to push her over! to trample on her! to tear her! But she only pressed her gently aside and ran and opened the oven door, and then said, "Oh *my!*" and raised a window to let the smoke out. . . . "I'll let him go," she said. But when Mary tried to put her arms around her, and say brokenly how grateful she was, Miss Lydia shrank away and said, harshly, "*Don't!*"

"I couldn't bear to have her touch me," she told herself afterward; "she didn't love him when he was a baby."

However, it was arranged, and the visit was made. It was a great experience for Johnny! The stage to

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Mercer, the railroad journey across the mountains, the handsome house, the good times every minute of every day! Barnum's! Candy shops! New clothes (and old ones dropped about on the floor for Mrs. Robertson to pick up!) And five five-dollar bills to carry back to Old Chester! Then the week ended. . . . Mrs. Robertson, running to bring him his hat and make sure he had a clean handkerchief, and patting the collar of his coat with plump fingers, cried when she said good-by; and Johnny sighed, and said he had a stomach ache, and he hated to go home. His mother glanced triumphantly at his father.

"(Do you hear that?) Do you love me, Johnny?" she demanded.

"Yes'm," Johnny said, scowling.

"As much as Miss Lydia?"

Johnny stared at her, "*Course* not."

"She doesn't give you so many presents as I do."

"*Mary!*" Johnny's father protested.

But Johnny was equal to the occasion.

"I'd just as leaves," said he, "give you one of my five dollars to pay for 'em"—which made even his mother laugh. "Goo'-by," said Johnny. "I guess I've eaten too much. I've had a fine time. Much obliged. No, I do' want any more candy. O-o-oh!" said Johnny, "I wish I hadn't eaten so much! I hate going home."

But he went—bearing his sheaves with him,—his presents and his five-dollar bills and his stomach ache. And he said he wished he could go right straight back to Philadelphia!

"Do you?" said Miss Lydia, faintly.

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"But she's—funny, Aunt Lydia."

"How, 'funny'?"

"Well," said Johnny, scrubbing the back of his hand across his cheeks, "she's always kissing me and talking about my liking her. Oh—I don't really mind her, much. She's nice enough. But I *don't* like kissing ladies. But I like visiting her," he added, candidly; "she takes me to lots of places and gives me presents. I like presents," said Johnny. "I hope she'll gimme a gun." . . .

That night, the kissing lady, pacing up and down like a caged creature in her handsome parlor, which seemed so empty and orderly now, said suddenly to her husband, "Why don't we adopt him?"

"H-s-s-h!" he cautioned her; then, in a low voice, "I've thought of that."

At which she instantly retreated. "It is out of the question! People would—think."

CHAPTER VI

JOHNNY would have had his gun right off, and many other things, too, if Miss Lydia hadn't interfered. "Please don't send him so many presents," she wrote Mrs. Robertson in her scared, determined way. And Mary, reading that letter, fed her bitterness with the memory of something which had happened during the visit.

"It's just what I said," she told Johnny's father; "she influences him against us by not letting us give him presents! I know that from the way he talks. I told him, after I bought that stereopticon for him, that I could give him nicer things than she could, and—"

"Mary! You mustn't say things like that!"

"And—and—" Mary said, crying, "he said, 'I like Auntie without any presents.' You see? Influence! The idea of her daring to say we mustn't give him a gun. He's *ours*!"

"No, he's hers," Johnny's father said, sadly; "she has the whip hand, Mary—unless we tell the truth."

"Of course we can't do that," she said, sobbing.

But after that Philadelphia experience Miss Lydia—a fragile creature now, who lived and breathed for her boy—was obliged every winter to let Johnny visit these people who had disowned him, cast him off, deserted him!—that was the way she put it to herself.

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She had to let him go because she couldn't think of any excuse for saying he couldn't go. She even asked Doctor Lavendar for a reason for refusing invitations, which the appreciative and frankly acquisitive Johnny was anxious to accept. With a gift of a bunch of lamplighters in her hand Miss Lydia went to the rectory, offering, as an explanation of her call, the fact that Johnny had got into a fight with the youngest Mack boy and rubbed his nose in the gutter, and Mrs. Mack was very angry, and said her boy's nose would never be handsome again; and she, Miss Lydia, didn't know what to do because Johnny wouldn't tell her what the fight was about and wouldn't apologize.

"Johnny's fifteen and the Mack boy is seventeen; and a boy doesn't need a handsome nose," said Doctor Lavendar. "I'd not interfere, if I were you."

Then she got the real question out: Didn't Doctor Lavendar think it might be bad for Johnny to visit Mr. and Mrs. Robertson? "They're very rich, you know," Miss Lydia warned him, piteously.

"They've taken a fancy to him, have they?" Doctor Lavendar asked. She nodded. The old man meditated. "Lydia," he said at last, "you are so rich, and they're so poor. I'd be charitable, if I were you."

So she was charitable. And for the next three or four years Johnny went away for his good times, and old Miss Lydia stayed at home and had very bad times for fear that Mr. and Mrs. Robertson might suddenly turn into Johnny's father and mother! Then the father and mother would come to Old Chester in the summer and have their bad times, for fear that Miss Lydia would "influence" Johnny against Mr. and Mrs. Robertson. (We got to quite like the Rob-

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ertsons, though we didn't see much of them. "Pity they had no children," said Old Chester; "all that Smith money going begging!")

The Smith money certainly went begging, so far as Johnny was concerned. Every time his father and mother tried to spend it on him Miss Lydia put her little frightened will between the boy and his grandfather's fortune. "Boys can't accept presents, Johnny, except from relations, you know," she would tell him; "it isn't nice." And Johnny, thinking of the gun or the horse or what not, would stick out his lips and sigh and say no, he "s'posed not." As a result of such remarks he developed as healthy a pride as one could hope for in a lad, and by the time he was eighteen he was hot with embarrassment when Mrs. Robertson tried to force things upon him.

"No, ma'am," he would say, awkwardly. "I—I can't take any presents."

"Why not?" she would demand, deeply hurt.

"Well, you know, you are not a relation," Johnny would say; and his mother would rush up to her room and pace up and down, up and down, and cry until she could hardly see.

"She's robbed us of our own child!" she used to tell her husband.

As for Johnny, he told Miss Lydia once that Mrs. Robertson was kind, and all that, but she was a nuisance.

"Oh, Johnny, I wouldn't say *that*, dear. She's been nice to you."

"What makes her?" said Johnny, curiously. "Why is she always gushing round?"

"Well, she likes you, Johnny."

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Johnny grinned. "I don't see why. I'm afraid I'm not awfully polite to her. She was telling me she'd give me anything on earth I wanted,—made me feel like a fool!" said Johnny, "and I said, 'Aunty gives me everything I want, thank you'; and she said, 'She doesn't love you as much as I do.' And I said (all this love talk makes me kind of sick!) I said, 'Oh yes, she does; she loved me when I was a squealing baby! You didn't know me then.'"

"What did she say?" Miss Lydia asked, breathlessly.

"Oh, she sort of cried," said Johnny, with a bored look.

But his perplexity about Mrs. Robertson's gush lingered in his mind, and a year or two later,—on his nineteenth birthday, as it happened,—he asked Miss Lydia again what on earth it meant? The Robertsons had braved the raw Old Chester winter and come down to the old house to be near their son on that day. They came like the Greeks, bearing gifts, which, it being Johnny's birthday, they knew could not be refused—and old Miss Lydia, unlike the priest of Apollo, had no spear to thrust at them except the forbidden spear of Truth! So her heart was in her mouth when Johnny, who had gone to supper with his father and mother, came home at nearly midnight and told her how good they were to him. But he was preoccupied as he talked, and once or twice he frowned. Then suddenly he burst out:

"Aunty, why does Mr. Robertson bother about me?"

"Does he?" Miss Lydia said.

"Well, yes; he says he wants me to go into his

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firm when I leave college. He says he'll give me mighty good pay. But—but he wants me to take his name."

"*Oh!*" said Miss Lydia. She looked so little and pretty, lying there in her bed, with her soft white hair—the frizette had vanished some years ago—parted over her delicate furrowed brow, and her blue eyes wide and frightened, like a child's, that Johnny suddenly hugged her.

"As for the name part of it," he said, "I said my name was Smith. Not handsome or distinguished but my own. I said I had no desire to change it, but if I ever did it would be to Sampson."

A meager tear stood in the corner of Miss Lydia's eye. "That was very nice of you, Johnny," she said, quaveringly.

"I'd like the business part of it all right," said Johnny. . . . "Say, Aunt Lydia—what is all the milk in the coconut about me? Course I'm not grown up for nothing; I know I'm—queer. I got on to that when I was fifteen—I put the date on Eddy Mack's nose! But I'd like to know, really, who I am?"

"You're my boy," said Miss Lydia.

"You bet I am!" said Johnny; "but who were my father and mother?"

"They lived out West, and—"

"I know all that fairy tale, Aunty. Let's have the facts."

Miss Lydia was silent; her poor old eyes blinked; then she said: "They—deserted you, Johnny. But you mustn't mind."

The young man's face reddened sharply. "They

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weren't married, I suppose, when I was born?" he said, in a husky voice.

"They—got married before you were born."

He frowned, but he was obviously relieved; then he looked puzzled. "Yet they deserted me? Were they too poor to take care of me?"

"Well, no," Miss Lydia confessed.

"Not poor, yet they dumped me onto your doorstep?" he repeated, bewildered, but with a slow anger growing in his face. "Well, I guess I'm well rid of 'em if they were that kind of people! Cowards. I'd rather have murderers 'round, than cowards!"

"Oh, my dear, you mustn't be unjust. They gave me money for your support."

"Money!" he said. "They paid you to take me off their hands?" He paused; "Aunt Lydia," he said—and as he spoke his upper lip lifted and she saw his teeth—"Aunt Lydia, I'll never ask you about those people again. I have no interest in them. They are nothing to me, just as I was nothing to them. But tell me one thing, is Smith my name?"

"Yes," said Miss Lydia (it's his *middle* name, she assured herself truthfully).

But Johnny laughed: "I guess you just called me Smith. Well, that's all right, though I'd rather you'd made it Sampson. But Smith will do. I said so to Mrs. Robertson. I said that my name was the same as her father's, and I thought he was the finest old man I'd ever known, and, though I was no relation, I hoped my Smith name would be as dignified as his."

"What did she say?" said Miss Lydia.

"Oh, she got weepy," said Johnny, good-naturedly; "she's always either crying or kissing. But she's kind."

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Look at those!" he said, displaying some sleeve links that his mother's soft, adoring fingers had fastened into his cuffs. "Well, I don't take a berth with a new name tacked on to it, at Robertson & Carey's. He'll have to get some other fellow to swap names for him!"

He went off to his room, his face still dark with the deep, elemental anger which that word "deserted" had stirred in him, but whistling as if to declare his entire indifference to the deserters. Old Miss Lydia, alone, trembled very much. "Take their name! *What will they do next?*" she said to herself.

The Robertsons were asking each other the same question, "What can we do now to get him?" The lure of a business opportunity had not moved the boy at all, and what he had said about being called Sampson had been like a knife-thrust in their hearts. It made Mary Robertson so angry that she sprang at a fierce retaliation: "She *couldn't* keep him—he wouldn't stay with her—if we told him the truth!" she said to Johnny's father.

"But we never can tell him," Carl reminded her.

"Sometimes I think she'll drive me to it!" said Mary.

"No," Robertson said, shortly.

"No one would know it but the boy himself. And if he knew it he'd let us adopt him. And that would mean taking his own name."

"No!" Carl broke out, "it won't do! You see, I—don't want him to know." He paused, then seemed to pull the words out with a jerk: "I won't let him have any disrespect for his mother, and—"

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He got up and tramped about the room. "Damn it! I don't want to lose his good opinion, myself."

Her face turned darkly red. "Oh," she cried, passionately, "'opinion'! What difference does his 'opinion' make to me? A mother is a mother. And I love him! Oh, I love him so, I could just *die*! If he would put his arms around me the way he does to that terrible Miss Lydia, and kiss me, and say"—she clenched her hands and closed her eyes, and whispered the word she hungered to hear—"'*Mother! Mother!*' If I could hear him say *that*," she said, "I could just lie down and die! Couldn't you?—to hear him say 'Father'?"

Robertson set his teeth. "And what kind of an idea would he have of his 'father?' No, I won't consent to it!"

"We can't get him in any other way," she urged.

"Then we'll never get him. I can't face it."

"You don't love him as much as I do!"

"I love him enough not to want to risk losing his respect."

But this sentiment was beyond Johnny's mother; all she thought of was her aching hunger for the careless, good-humored, and bored young man. The hunger for him grew and grew; it gnawed at her day and night. She had even urged Carl to live in Princeton while Johnny was in college, and only Johnny's father's common sense kept this project from being carried out. "You're afraid!" she taunted him.

"Dear," he said, kindly, "I'm afraid of being an ass. If he saw us tagging after him he'd hate us both. He's a man!" Carl said, proudly. "No, I've

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no fancy for losing the regard of"—he paused—"my son," he said, very quietly.

His wife put her hand over her mouth and stared at him; the word was too great for her; it was her baby she thought of, not her son.

In Johnny's first vacation, when she had rushed to Old Chester in June to open the house, she was met by the information that he was going off for the summer on a geological expedition.

Mary's disappointment made her feel a little sick. "What *shall* I do without you!"

"Oh, if Auntie can do without me, I guess outsiders can," said Johnny, with clumsy amiability.

"We'll be here when you get back in September," she said.

He yawned, and said, "All right." Then he strolled off, and she went upstairs and cried.

Johnny, walking home after this embarrassing interview, striking at the roadside brambles with a switch and whistling loudly, said to himself: "How on earth did Mr. Robertson fall in love with her? *He's* got brains." A day or two later he went off for his geological summer, leaving in his mother's heart that rankling word, "outsiders." As the weeks dragged along and she counted the days until he would be back, she brooded and brooded over it. It festered so deeply that she could not speak of it to Johnny's father. But once she said: "He's ungrateful! See all we've done for him!"—and Carl realized that bitterness toward Miss Lydia, who had "robbed" her, was extending to the boy himself. And again—it was in August, and Johnny was to be at home in

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a fortnight—she said, “He ought to be *made* to come to us!”

Her husband looked at her in surprise. “You can’t ‘make’ anybody love you, Mary. We are just outsiders to him.”

She cried out so sharply that he was frightened, not knowing that he had turned a dagger-word in the wound.

Perhaps it was the intolerable pain of knowing that she was helpless that drove her one day, without Carl’s knowledge, to the rectory. “I’ll put it to Doctor Lavendar as—as somebody else’s story—the trouble of a ‘friend,’ and maybe he can tell me how I can make Johnny feel that we are *not* outsiders! Oh, he owes it to us to do what we want! I’ll tell Doctor Lavendar that the father and mother lived out West and are friends of mine. . . . He’ll never put two and two together.”

She walked past the rectory twice before she could get her courage to the point of knocking. When she did, it was Willy King who opened the door.

“Oh—is Doctor Lavendar ill?” she said. And Doctor King answered, dryly, that when you are eighty-two you are not particularly well.

“I though I’d just drop in and ask his advice on something—nothing important,” said Johnny’s mother, breathlessly. “I’ll go away, and come some other time.”

Upon which, from the open window overhead, came a voice: “I won’t be wrapped up in cotton batting! Send Mary Robertson upstairs.”

“Haven’t I any rights?” Willy called back, good-naturedly, and Doctor Lavendar retorted:

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"Maybe you have, but I have many wrongs. Come along, Mary."

She went up, saying to herself: "I'll not speak of it. I'll just say I've come to see him." She was so nervous when she entered the room that her breath caught in her throat and she could hardly say, "How do you do?"

The old man was in bed under a gay calico patchwork quilt, and with a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* on the table beside him. He held out a veined and trembling hand:

"William's keeping me alive so he can charge me for two calls a day. Well, my dear, what can I do for you?"

Mrs. Robertson sat down in a big armchair and said, panting, that—that it was terribly hot.

Doctor Lavendar watched her from under his heavy, drooping eyelids.

"There was something I was going to ask you about," she said, "but it's no matter. Doctor King says you are sick."

"You mustn't believe all Doctor King tells you."

"I just wanted to get advice for—for somebody else. But it's no matter."

"Let's hear about the 'somebody else.'"

"They are not Old Chester people—so you won't mind if I don't name names?"

"Not in the least," said Doctor Lavendar, genially. "Call 'em Smith; that's a somewhat general title."

"Oh—no, that's not their name," she said, panic-stricken—then saw that he had meant it as a joke, and said, trying to smile, yes, there *were* a good many Smiths in the world! Then suddenly her misery rose

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like a wave, and swept her into words: "These people are terribly unhappy, at least the mother is, because—" She paused, stammered, felt she had gone too far, and stumbled into contradictions which could not have misled anyone, certainly not Doctor Lavendar. "They, these people, had let their child be adopted—oh, a great many years ago, because they—they were not so situated that they could bring him—bring it—up. But they could, now. And they wanted to get him back—her, I mean," said Mary; "I believe it was a little girl. But the little girl didn't want to come back to them. And the person who had taken her influenced her against her parents, who had done *everything* for him!—given him everything a child could want. It's cruel," said Mary. "Cruel! I know the parents, and—"

"Mary," said Doctor Lavendar, gently, "so do I."

She recoiled as if from a blow. "No—oh no! You are mistaken, sir. You couldn't know them. His—her relatives don't live here. They live in another city. You couldn't possibly know them!"

She was white with terror. What would Carl say? Oh, she must lie her way out of it! How mad she had been to come here and hint at things!

"I have known Johnny Smith's parentage for several years, Mary."

"I didn't say the child was Johnny Smith!"

"I said so."

"I don't know what you're talking about! The father and mother lived out West, but I don't know the child. He is nothing to me."

"You mean you are nothing to him? And yet you do love him, Mary, my dear; I know you do."

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She tried, in panic denial, to meet his quiet eyes—then gave a little moan and bent over and hid her face in the patchwork quilt.

“Oh, I do love him—I do,” she said in a whisper. “But he doesn’t love me. . . . And yet he is *mine*—Carl’s and mine.” She lifted her head, and anger flared up again: “Who told you? Oh, it was Miss Lydia, and she promised she wouldn’t! How wicked in her!”

“No one told me.” There was a moment’s silence, then Doctor Lavendar said, “There were people in Old Chester who thought he was Miss Lydia’s.”

“Fools! fools!” she said, passionately.

“No one came forward to deny it.”

She did not notice this; the flood of despair and longing broke into entreaty; how could she get her child—her own child—who considered her just an outsider! “That’s Miss Lydia’s influence!” she said.

Doctor Lavendar listened, asked a question or two, and then was silent.

“I am dying for him!” she said; “oh, I am in agony for him!”

The old man looked at her with pitying keenness. Was this agony a spiritual birth or was it just the old selfishness which had never brooked denial? And if indeed it was a travail of the spirit, would not the soul be stillborn if her son’s love should fail to sustain it? Yet why should Johnny love her? . . . Mary was talking and trying not to cry; her words were a fury of pain and protest:

“Miss Lydia won’t give him up to people who haven’t any claim upon him,—I mean any claim that is known. Of course we have a claim—the greatest!

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But Johnny doesn't know, so he won't consent to take our name—though it is our *right*! He doesn't know any reason for it. You see?"

"I see."

"I suppose if we told him the truth we could get him. But I'm afraid to tell him. Yet without telling him I can't make him love me! He said I was an 'outsider.' *I!* his mother! But if he knew there was a reason—"

Doctor Lavendar looked out of the window into the yellowing leaves of the old jargonell-pear tree, and shook his head. "Hearts don't come when Reason whistles to 'em," he said.

"Oh, if I could just hear him say 'mother'!"

"Why should he say 'mother'? You haven't been a mother to him."

"I've given him everything!"

Doctor Lavendar was silent.

"He *ought* to come to us. He is ours; and he owes us—"

"Just what you've earned, Mary, just what you've earned! That's what children 'owe' their parents."

"Oh, what am I to do? What am I to do?"

"How much do you want him, Mary?"

She was stammering with sobs. "It's all I want—it's my life—"

"*Perhaps* publicity would win him. He has a great respect for courage. So perhaps—"

She cringed. "But that couldn't be! It couldn't be. Don't you understand?"

"Poor Mary!" said Doctor Lavendar. "Poor girl!"

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"Doctor Lavendar, make him come to us. *You* can do it. You can do anything!"

"Mary, neither you nor I nor anybody else can 'make' a harvest anything but the seed which has been sowed. My child, you sowed vanity and selfishness." . . . By and by he put his hand on hers and said: "Mary, wait. Wait till you love him more and yourself less."

It was dark when she went away.

When Doctor King came in in the evening he said to himself that Mary Robertson and the whole caboodle of 'em weren't worth the weariness in the wise old face.

"William," said Doctor Lavendar, "I hope there won't be any conundrums in heaven; I don't seem able to answer them any more." Then the whimsical fatigue vanished and he smiled. "Lately I've just said, 'Wait: God knows.' And stopped guessing."

But he didn't stop thinking.

CHAPTER VII

AS for Johnny's mother, she kept on thinking, too, but she yielded, for the moment, to the inevitableness of her harvest. And of course the devotion, and the invitations to Philadelphia, and the summers in Old Chester continued. Johnny's bored good humor accepted them all patiently enough; "for she is kind," he reminded himself. "And I like *him*," he used to tell his aunt Lydia. Once he confided his feelings on this subject to William King:

"They are queer folks, the Robertsons," Johnny said. "Why do they vegetate down here in Old Chester? They don't seem to know anybody but Aunt Lydia."

William and the big fellow were jogging along in the doctor's shabby buggy out toward Miss Lydia's; she was very frail that summer and Johnny had insisted that William King should come to see her. "The Robertsons know *you*, apparently," the doctor said.

"Well, yes," John said, "and they've been nice to me ever since I can remember."

"G'on!" Doctor King told his mare, and slapped a rein down on Jinny's back.

"But, Doctor King, they *are* queer," Johnny insisted. "What's the milk in the coconut about 'em?"

"Maybe a thunderstorm soured it."

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Johnny grinned, then he looked at Jinny's ears, coughed, and said, "I'd like to ask you a question, sir."

"Go ahead."

"When people are kind to you—just what do you owe 'em? I didn't ask them to be kind to me—I mean the Robertsons—but, holy Peter!" said Johnny, "they've given me presents ever since I was a child. They even had a wild idea of getting me to take their name! I said, 'No, thank you!' Why should I take their name? . . . Mrs. Robertson always seems sort of critical of Aunty. Think of that! Course she never says anything; she'd better not! If she did I'd raise Cain. But I *feel* it," Johnny said, frowning. "Well, what I want to know is, what do you owe people who do you favors? Mind you, *I* don't want their favors!"

"Well," William ruminated, "I should say that we owe people who do us favors, the truth of how we feel about them. If the truth wouldn't be agreeable to them, don't accept the favors!"

"Well, the 'truth' is that I get mad when Mrs. Robertson looks down on Aunty! Think of what she's stood for me!" the boy said, suddenly very red in the face. "When I was fifteen one of the fellows told me I was—was her son. I rubbed his nose in the mud."

"Oh, that was how Mack got his broken nose, was it?" Doctor King inquired, much interested. "Well, I'm glad you did it. I guess it cured him of being *one* kind of a fool. There was a time when I wanted to rub one or two female noses in the mud. However, they are really not worth thinking of, Johnny."

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"No," John agreed, "but anybody who looks cross-eyed in my presence at Aunt Lydia will get his head punched."

"Amen," said William King, and drew Jinny in at Miss Lydia's gate.

It cannot be said that William King's opinion as to what we owe people who do us favors was very illuminating to Johnny. "I like 'em—and I don't like 'em," he told Miss Lydia, with a bothered look. "But I wish to Heaven she'd let up on presents!"

On the whole he liked them more than he failed to like them; perhaps because they were, to a big joyous, somewhat conceited youngster, rather pitiful in the way in which they seemed to hang upon him. He said as much once to his aunt Lydia; Mrs. Robertson had asked him to come to supper, but had not asked Miss Lydia. "I suppose I've got to go," he said scowling, "but they needn't think I'd rather have supper with them than with you? I just go because I'm sorry for 'em."

"I am, too, Johnny," she said. She had ceased to be afraid of them by this time. Yet she might have been just a little afraid if she had known all that this special invitation involved. . . .

Mary Robertson no longer shared her longing for her son with her husband. She had not even told him of that day when her misery had welled up and overflowed in frantic words to Doctor Lavendar. But she had never resigned herself to reaping what she had sowed. She was still determined, *somehow*, to get possession of her boy. Occasionally she spoke of this determination to Doctor Lavendar, just because it was a relief to put it into words; but he never gave

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her much encouragement. He could only suggest a choice of two things: secrecy—and fortitude; or truth—and doubtful hope.

Little by little hope gained, and truth seemed more possible. And by and by a plan grew in her mind: she would get Doctor Lavendar to help her tell Johnny the truth; then, supported by Religion (in the person of Dr. Lavendar), she would tell her son that it was his duty to live with her;—"nobody will know *why!* And he can't say 'no,' if Doctor Lavendar says 'honor thy father and thy mother'!" That Doctor Lavendar would say this, she had no doubt whatever, for was he not a minister, and ministers always counseled people to obey the Commandments. "But when I get him here, with Johnny, we must be by ourselves," she thought; "I won't speak before *her.*"

So that was why Miss Lydia was not invited to supper when Johnny was—Johnny and Doctor Lavendar! Mary Robertson was so tense all that September day when her two guests were expected, that her husband noticed it.

"You're not well, Mary?" he said.

"Oh, yes, yes!" she said—she was pacing up and down, up and down, like a caged creature. "Carl, Doctor Lavendar is coming this evening."

"My dear, I think that is about the tenth time you have mentioned it! I should not call the old gentleman a very exciting visitor."

"And Johnny is coming."

"Well, what of it? I hope Doctor Lavendar won't ask him to say his catechism! he's a heathen."

As it happened, Johnny came first, and his mother was so eager to see him and touch him that, hearing

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his step, she ran to help him off with his coat—to his great embarrassment; then she came into the library clinging to his arm. Father and son greeted each other with, "Hello, youngster!" and "Hello, sir!" and Johnny added that it was beginning to rain like blazes.

"I sent the carriage for Doctor Lavendar," Mrs. Robertson said.

"He coming?" Johnny asked.

"Yes," she said; "he's very, very good, Johnny, and"—she paused, then said, breathlessly, "*you must do whatever he wants you to do.*"

The young man looked faintly interested. "What's she up to now?" he asked himself; then began to talk to his father. But remembering his aunt Lydia's parting junction, "Now, Johnny, be nice to Mrs. Robertson," he was careful to speak to his mother once in a while. Happening to catch the twinkle of her rings, he tried to be especially "nice:"

"When I get rich I'm going to buy Auntie a diamond ring like yours, Mrs. Robertson."

"I'll give you one of mine, if you'll wear it," she said, eagerly.

Johnny's guffaw of laughter ended in a droll look at his father, who said:

"My dear Mary! This *cub*, and a diamond ring?"

She was too absorbed in loving her child to be hurt by his bad manners, and, besides, at that moment Doctor Lavendar arrived, and she ran out into the hall to welcome him; as she took his hand she whispered:

"Doctor Lavendar, you will help me with Johnny?"

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I am going to tell him. I'm going to tell him to-night!—and I depend on you to make him come to us."

The old man's face grew very grave; he looked closely at Mary, standing there, clasping and unclasping her jeweled hands, but he did not answer. Later, when they went out to the dining room, he was still silent, just watching Mary and listening to Johnny—who laughed and talked (and was "nice" to his mother), and ate enormously, and who looked, sitting there at his grandfather's old table, as much like the new Mr. Smith as twenty-three can look like seventy-eight.

"Well," the young fellow said, friendly and confidential to the company at large, "what do you suppose? It's settled—my 'career'!"

"I hope that means Robertson and Carey?" Mr. Robertson said. He glanced over at his son with a sort of aching pride in his strength and carelessness. "I've offered this youngster a place in my firm," he explained to Doctor Lavendar, who said:

"Have you, indeed?"

"No," Johnny said, "it doesn't mean Robertson and Carey, though you're mighty kind, Mr. Robertson. But you see I can't leave Old Chester. It would pull Aunt Lydia up by the roots to go away. And of course I couldn't go without her."

Mary's plump hand, with its shining rings, clenched sharply on the tablecloth; she drew in her breath, but she said nothing.

"Well, what are you going to do?" Carl said, not daring to meet his wife's eyes.

"Aunt Lydia got a job for me in Mr. Dilworth's hardware store."

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His mother cried out—then checked herself. "Miss Lydia ought not to have thought of such a thing!" she tried to speak quietly, but she had to bite her lip to keep it steady.

"Mary!" her husband warned her.

John's face darkened. "Aunty ought always to do whatever she does do," he said.

"Of course," his father agreed, soothingly.

"I only meant," Mary explained, in a frightened voice, "that a hardware store isn't much of a chance for a man like you."

"It means staying in Old Chester with Aunty," he explained; "she's not very well now, Mrs. Robertson," he said, and sighed; "it would be too much for her, to move. She's not equal to it." His strong, rather harsh face softened and sobered. "And as for a hardware store not being a chance for *me*—I mean to make Rome howl with a Mercer branch! You see, Aunty bought a half-interest for me. The Lord knows where she got the money! Saved it out of her food all these years, I guess."

"She didn't, apparently, save it out of your food," Doctor Lavendar said, dryly; "I believe you weigh two hundred, Johnny."

"Only a hundred and seventy-four," the young man assured him.

Mary, listening, was tingling all over; she had planned a very cautious approach to the truth which was to give her son back to her. She meant first to hint, and then to admit, and then to declare her *right* to his love. But that Miss Lydia, without consulting Johnny's father and mother, should have put him into such a business—"my son in a hardware store!"

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Mary thought;—that Miss Lydia should have dared! “He’s mine—he’s mine—he’s mine! . . . Of course,” she was saying to herself as they went back to the library after dinner—“of course, he’ll give it up the minute he knows who he is. But I hate her!”

The room, in the September dusk, was lighted only by a lamp on the big desk; the windows opening on the garden were raised, for it was hot after the rain, and the air blew in, fragrant with wet leaves and the scent of some late roses. Johnny’s father, sinking down in a great leather chair, watched the young, vigorous figure standing in front of the mantelpiece, smoking and, after the fashion of his years, laying down the law for the improvement of the world. Doctor Lavendar did not look at Johnny, but at his mother, who stood clutching the corner of the big desk—that desk at which, one September night twenty-three years ago, Johnny’s grandfather had been sitting when Miss Lydia came into the library. . . .

“Mary, my dear, aren’t you going to sit down?” said Doctor Lavendar.

She did not seem to hear him. “Look here,” she said, shrilly; “I can’t stand it! I won’t stand it!”

Carl sprang up and laid his hand on her arm. “Mary!” he said, under his breath. “*Please*,” he besought her; “for God’s sake don’t—don’t—”

“Johnny, you belong to me,” Mary said.

John Smith, his cigar halfway to his lips, paused, bewildered and alarmed. “Isn’t she well?” he said, in a low voice to Doctor Lavendar.

“I’m perfectly well. But I’m going to speak. Doctor Lavendar will tell you I have a right to speak! Tell him so, Doctor Lavendar.”

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"She has the right to speak," the old man said.

"You hear that?" said the mother. "He says I have a right to you!"

"I didn't say that," said Doctor Lavendar.

"Mary," her husband protested, "I will not allow"—but she did not hear him:

"Miss Lydia sha'n't have you any longer. You are *mine*, Johnny—*mine*. I want you, and I'm going to have you!"

John Smith's face went white; he put his cigar down on the mantelpiece, went across the long room, closed the door into the hall, then came back and looked at his mother. No one spoke. Doctor Lavendar had bent his head and shut his eyes; he would not watch the three struggling souls before him. Johnny slowly turned his eyes toward Mr. Robertson.

"And you—?"

"Yes," his father said. "John, you'll make the best of us, won't you?"

Then, unsteadily, and looking always at his father, John began to speak. "Of course it makes no difference to me. Aunt Lydia and I have our own life. But—I'm sorry, sir." He put his shaking hands into his pockets. "You and Mrs. Robertson—"

"Oh, say 'mother'! Say 'mother'!" she cried out.

"—have been very kind to me, always,"—he paused, in a sudden, realizing adjustment: their "kindness," then, had not been the flattery he had supposed? It was just—*love*? "You've been awfully kind," he said, sharply humiliated. "Once, I did wonder . . . then I thought it couldn't be, because—because, you see, I've always liked you, sir," he ended, awkwardly.

Carl Robertson was dumb.

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"I've told you," his mother said, trembling—her fingers, catching at the sheet of blotting paper on the desk, tore off a scrap of it, rolled it, twisted it, then pulled off another scrap—"I've told you, because you are to come to us. You are to take our name—your name." She paused, swallowing hard, and struggling to keep the tears back. "You are *ours*, not hers. People thought you were hers, and it just about killed me."

Instantly the blood rushed into John Smith's face; his eyes blazed. "What!" he stammered; "what! You knew that?" . . . His upper lip slowly lifted, and Doctor Lavendar saw his set teeth. "You *knew* that some damned fools thought *that*, of my aunt Lydia? Are you my mother, and yet you could allow another woman—My God!" he said, softly.

She did not realize what she had done; she began to reassure him frantically.

"No one shall ever know! No one will ever guess—"

Doctor Lavendar shook his head. "Mary," he warned her, "we must be known, even as also we know, before we enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

They did not listen to him.

"You mean," John said, "that you won't let it be known that you are—my mother?"

"No, never! never! It couldn't be known—I promise you."

"Thank you," said John Smith, sardonically,—and Doctor Lavendar held up protesting hands. But no one looked at him.

"It would only be supposed," Carl said, "that, being childless people, we would make you our son."

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Nothing, as your mother says, would need be known."

"How could you 'make me your son' and not have it known?"

"I mean by law," his father explained.

"There was a 'law' that made me your son twenty-three years ago. That's the only law that counts. You broke it when I was born. Can I be born again?"

"Yes," said Doctor Lavendar.

"You deserted me," Johnny said, "and Aunt Lydia took me. Shall I be like you, and desert her? Little Aunt Lydia!" He gave a furious sob. "I'm not *your* sort!" he said. The words were like a blow in Mary's face.

"Doctor Lavendar, tell him—tell him, 'honor thy father and thy mother!'"

"'Honor'?" her son said. "Did I understand *you* to use the word 'honor'?"

Again Doctor Lavendar raised an admonishing hand. "Careful, John."

"He means," Carl said to his wife, quietly, though his face was gray—"he means he wants us to acknowledge him. Mary, I'm willing. Are you?"

Doctor Lavendar lifted his bowed head, and his old eyes were suddenly eager with hope. Johnny's mother stood looking at her child, her face twisted with tears.

"*Must* I, to get him?" she gasped.

"No," Johnny said; "it is quite unnecessary." He smiled, so cruelly that his father's hands clenched; but Mary only said, in passionate relief, "Oh, you are good!" And the hope in Doctor Lavendar's eyes flickered out.

"Nothing shall ever be known?" her son repeated,

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still smiling. "Well, then, Mrs. Robertson, I thank you for 'nothing.'"

Doctor Lavendar frowned, and Mary recoiled, with a sort of moan. Carl Robertson cried out:

"Stop! You shall not speak so to your mother! I'm ashamed of you, sir!"

But the mother ran forward and caught at her son's arm. "Oh, but I will make it known! I will say who you are! I'll say you are mine! I will—I will—"

"You can't, for I'm not," he said.

She was clinging to him, but he looked over her head, eye to eye with his father. "How can I be her son, when she let people here in Old Chester believe that Aunt Lydia—"

"Johnny," said Doctor Lavendar, "it didn't make the slightest difference to Miss Lydia."

The young man turned upon him. "Doctor Lavendar, these two people didn't own me, even when a pack of fools believed—" He choked over what the fools believed. "They let them think *that*, of Aunt Lydia! As for this—this lady being my 'mother'—What's 'mother' but a word? Aunt Lydia may not be my mother, but I am her son. Yes—yes—I am."

Then he looked at his father, and caught his breath. "I'm sorry for *him*," he said to Doctor Lavendar.

"We will acknowledge you to-morrow," Carl Robertson said.

"I won't acknowledge you!" his son flung back at him. "All these years you have hidden behind Aunty. Stay hidden. I won't betray you."

Mary had dropped down into her father's chair; her face was covered by her hands on the desk. They

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heard her sob. Her husband bent over her and put his arms about her.

"Mary," he said, in a whisper, "forgive me; I brought it on you—my poor Mary!" Then he stood up and looked at his son in suffering silence. "I don't blame you," he said, simply.

At that, suddenly, John Smith broke. The pain of it all had begun to penetrate his passionate loyalty. For a moment there was silence, except for Mary's sobs. Then Johnny said, hoarsely, "Mr. Robertson, I'm sorry. But . . . there isn't anything to do about it. I—I guess I'll go home."

"John," said Doctor Lavendar, "your aunt Lydia would want you to be kind."

Carl Robertson shook his head. "We don't want kindness, Doctor Lavendar. I guess we don't want anything he can give. Good-by, boy," he said.

His son, passing him, caught at his hand and wrung it. "Goo'-by," he said, roughly. There were tears in his eyes.

Then, without a look at his mother, he walked quickly down the room, and out into the hall. They could hear him putting on his hat and coat. . . . Carl Robertson pressed his clenched fist against his lips, and turned his back to the other two. Mary was silent. Doctor Lavendar covered his eyes for a moment; then, just as Johnny's hand was on the knob of the front door he called out:

"John, wait a minute, will you? Give me an arm; I'm going to walk home."

The young man, out in the hall, frowned, and set his jaw.

"All right," he called back, briefly. There was no

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detaining word or cry from the library while Doctor Lavendar shuffled silently into his coat,—and a minute later the door of the new Mr. Smith's house closed upon his grandson and the old minister.

It had begun to rain again, and the driveway was very dark—darker even than on that September night when Johnny's mother had cringed back from Miss Lydia's little leading hand and they had hurried along under the big trees. It was her son who hurried now. . . .

"Not so fast, Johnny," said Doctor Lavendar.

"Excuse me, sir." He fell into step with the old man, but he was tense with the effort to walk slowly. . . . They were nearly at the gate before there was any speech between them. Then Johnny said violently:

"There's no use saying anything to me, Doctor Lavendar! Not a particle of use!"

"I haven't said anything, John."

"They got you here to—to influence me! I saw through it the minute—she began. But I never forgive," Johnny said; "I want you to understand that!" He was hurrying again. The old man pressed a little on his arm.

"I'm sorry to be so slow, Johnny."

"Oh—excuse me, sir; I didn't realize. . . . She threw me away. I've thrown her away. There's no use talking to me!"

Doctor Lavendar was silent.

"I tell you, I won't have anything to do with them—with her, I mean. He's not so bad. I—I liked him—in spite of—of everything. But she deserted me when I was born."

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"It is certainly cruel to desert a newborn thing," said Doctor Lavendar.

John Smith agreed, furiously—and his upper lip lifted.

"I think," said Doctor Lavendar, "something has been born to-night—" He was very much out of breath.

"I'm walking too fast again? I beg your pardon, sir," the boy said.

"Suppose we stand still for a minute," said Doctor Lavendar.

They stood still; the rain fell heavily on Doctor Lavendar's shoulders and dripped from the brim of his old felt hat. "She deserted me," John said. "There is nothing to be said in excuse. Nothing."

"No, desertion can never be excused," the old man agreed; "and, as you say, when your body was born, she left it. To-night her soul has been born. Do you mean to desert it, John?"

"Even a dog doesn't leave her pups!" John said.

("His grandfather over again!" Doctor Lavendar thought.) Yet it was to that inherited brutality that he made his appeal:

"No; a mother has to be higher than an animal, to desert her young," Doctor Lavendar said.

The young man's violent agreement broke off in the middle:—"What do you mean by that?"

"Shame is a strange thing," said Doctor Lavendar; "it can lift us up to heaven or push us down to hell; it gives us courage or it makes us cowards. An animal doesn't know shame."

"You mean that that woman—?"

"I mean your mother was ashamed, John—" The

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young man was silent. "She tried to get away from shame by getting away from you. Now she knows that only by staying with you could she really get away from it."

"I will *never* call her 'mother'!" Johnny burst out.

"Miss Lydia didn't stop to consider what she was going to call you; she just took care of you. Yet you weren't as helpless as that poor woman back there in that empty house. Johnny, her little weak soul, just born to-night, will die unless you take care of it."

The young man stood still, his hands clenched. Doctor Lavendar took off his soaking wet hat, shook it, put it on again, and waited. There was only the sound of the rain and the drip-drip from the big trees along the driveway. Then the boy said:

"You said yourself that desertion couldn't be excused! . . . I am ashamed to be known as belonging to her."

"That's just how she felt about you—*so she deserted you.*"

Silence, except for John Smith's panting breath. Down the road, through the lilac bushes, came the twinkle of a lamp in Miss Lydia's window.

"John," said Doctor Lavendar, "go back to your mother. If you don't, you will be doing just what she did. Be kind to her helpless soul, as Miss Lydia was to your helpless body."

Still silence. Then suddenly Mary's son flung Doctor Lavendar's hand from his arm and turned back, almost running, to vanish in the shadows of his grandfather's driveway. But as he ran, he threw

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over his shoulder some broken, passionate words that sounded like—"I *won't* be like her—"

Doctor Lavendar stood still for a minute; then he drew a great breath of relief and plodded on slowly into the rainy darkness.

"HOW *COULD* SHE!"

CHAPTER I

IF ANY reflection could be made upon Old Chester young men it was that Rose Knight, at thirty, was still Rose Knight. It is fair to add that most of our boys could say it wasn't their fault; nearly every youngster in town went through a period of being in love with her. And no wonder! . . . "She's good looking," Thomas Dilworth used to say; "and she has horse sense, and she makes you laugh, and, my Lord! what more do you want? I'd bet my bottom dollar," Mr. Dilworth always ended, "on Rose!"

Really, nobody could want more; the nobly shaped head, set on the snowy column of her throat, the dark, good-humored eyes, the laughing, generous mouth—all declared a nature as fragrant as her name. Tom Dilworth would have been glad if his own son had seen things that way; but instead poor Neddy Dilworth eloped with Helen Hayes, who, twenty years his senior, had flattered him into a proposal. If he had made up to Helen's sister, Lucy, it would have been easier for his family and more appropriate for Ned, for she was at least the boy's own age. But, though Lucy was pretty, and cleverer than most of us Old Chester girls, she had a quick little temper, and she was an awful flirt, as witness the way in which she kept poor freckled Harry Mack dangling between hope and angry despair; so perhaps if Ned Dilworth

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had to marry into the Hayes family, he did well to take the mature Helen—"Though, if he'd had any gumption," said Old Chester, "he'd have tried to get Rose Knight."

It wasn't a question of "gumption." Nobody could "get" her! Rose was too busy to fall in love, she said. She lived with her cousin, Mrs. Ezra Barkley, in an old stone house, all roped with wistaria and honeysuckle—where lived, also, Mrs. Ezra's lazy and religious nephew, Charles Welwood, and his sickly wife, Edith, and their constantly increasing family; and what with looking after everything and everybody, and teaching school, Rose really couldn't, as she said, take time to fall in love.

Then, suddenly, there arrived in Old Chester a Mercer young man, a doctor, who was to watch over us while our own William King went off for six months' rest. Willie hesitated about going, but Doctor Lavendar said:

"Off with you! This boy can give us quinine and blue mass just as well as you can. Probably better."

So William took his vacation; and when Dr. Lyman Holden settled down to prescribe for us, Rose, we observed, was not "too busy" to notice him! And no wonder. Holden was a nice fellow, with friendly eyes and a hilarious laugh. Also, he knew his trade, William said—although just at first, some of us didn't feel sure of this, so we sent his prescriptions to Doctor King to know if they were all right. William was in California, and we usually got well before we heard that it was perfectly safe to take the boy's pills. "Boy?" He was in the early thirties! Just the age for Rose. Thomas Dilworth was the first to say so,

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and all the rest of us agreed with him. "They're made for each other!" we said—"if only Lucy Hayes doesn't catch him first."

"Shucks!" said Tom Dilworth; "I bet my bottom dollar on Rose!"

Well, the obviously suitable happened: Lucy did not "catch" Doctor Holden, and Doctor Holden did "catch" Rose. "So, for once," said Mr. Dilworth, "Providence has taken my advice." Perhaps Harry Mack offered Providence some advice, too; for, in his angry misery at another refusal, he thought Lucy was looking in Doctor Holden's direction, so, naturally, he hoped Doctor Holden would look in Rose's direction! I will say that Lucy had been trying to comfort Harry by making this last refusal as gradual as possible; she had written friendly notes to him, and invited him to go to walk with her, so that she could "help him to get over it." "Exactly like pulling a tooth by degrees," said Doctor Lavendar.

But when Lyman Holden appeared Lucy stopped "helping" Harry—so abruptly that you might have thought the tooth would have come out with a jerk! But it didn't; he merely grew so vituperative—he referred to Lucy as that damned little flirt—that one couldn't blame her for not wanting to marry him. However, his period of saying, "If she be not fair for me"—or, to be exact, for he was not poetical, "I'd like to wring her neck!"—didn't last long; in a week he was as much in love as ever and more hopeful, because young Holden's eyes were so plainly fixed on Rose.

This was what happened the very day after the doctor arrived in Old Chester:

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He went to church and saw Rose, with four of the Charles Welwood children, two on either side of her. When his blue eyes caught her brown ones, his eyes looked away, decorously fastening themselves upon the page of his prayer book, where he got all mixed up in the responses. He was not an Episcopalian; in fact, it got about in Old Chester that he used to go to a Unitarian church in Philadelphia! But this was never proved, and so long as he came now to our church, "why," as Doctor Lavendar said, "rake up his past?" But, be this as it may, he went that first Sunday to the Rectory for dinner, and (so Mary reported) he spoke out, even before Doctor Lavendar had a chance to ask the blessing, and said, "I noticed a mighty pretty girl in the second pew from the front." (I believe it is not customary among Unitarians to ask a blessing, so probably he didn't know he was holding dinner back.)

"Oh yes," said Doctor Lavendar; "Miss Rose Knight."

"'Miss'? I thought she was 'Mrs.,' there were so many children in the pew," said the young man, never noticing Mary's black looks because of the cooling soup.

"She ought to be," said Doctor Lavendar; "some man doesn't know which side his bread's buttered! . . . *Bless, O Lord, we beseech Thee—*" . . . and his guest bent his head as properly as anybody. (I really don't think he was a Unitarian!) . . . "Yes; Rose is a big, generous creature. She lives with her cousin, Mrs. Ezra Barkley, and she looks after forty-'leven of Charles Welwood's youngsters. Charles is Mrs. Ezra's nephew. He and his Edith are

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always making nice little visits of a year or two at Mrs. Ezra's. Rose brings up their children."

"An attractive face," said Doctor Holden.

"She's an attractive girl—and sweet. She has a little school in the basement of my church. She's got more sense than most girls."

So that was how it began, and it really was a pretty love affair! It moved with a rapidity which was as amusing to Old Chester as it was satisfactory to young Holden. It wasn't a month before we felt pretty sure what was going to happen. Lucy Hayes said she felt sure—although she reminded the doctor, in her gay candid way, of the cup and the lip.

"Rose has as many beaux as there are gentlemen in Old Chester, doctor, so you'd better hurry up!"

This was at a party at Mrs. Mack's, and Harry Mack was, of course, hanging around Lucy, who, in a blue cross-barred muslin, flounced to her little waist, and a lace bertha and a white sash, was as pretty as could be. Harry, listening to her outburst about Rose, smiled cynically.

"Rose is the finest girl in town, Doctor," he volunteered.

"Indeed she is," Lucy agreed, turning a cold and pretty shoulder upon poor Henry. "I adore her!"

"I'm sure she returns it," the doctor declared, gallantly.

But she laughed. "I'm just a silly girl. They call me a flirt, Doctor Holden. Perhaps I'd better warn you about myself?"

"I shall be on my guard."

"Oh, *you!*" she said. "No girl would ever dare

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to flirt with you." Her eyes were blue and frank.

"And why not?" he protested, laughing.

But she was suddenly serious. "Because she'd be afraid to. *You* would see through her at once. Oh yes, I flirt, but not with my betters, Doctor Holden." (Harry Mack coughed.) "But Rose—darling Rose—never flirted in her life. And she's awfully intelligent. And good! I'm a dreadful sinner, compared to her."

"*That's* true, anyhow," Harry said.

"You should see the way she takes care of Edith Welwood's darling children. I love children," Lucy said, "but poor dear Edith is always having babies. Well! I give you warning. Hurry up!"

She was so eager in praising another girl that, though startled at those "babies" (this was in the '70's, when girls didn't talk obstetrics to young men), Lyman Holden couldn't help showing his admiration for her generosity. . . . "I can see that you and Miss Rose have lots of qualities in common," he said.

"Rose and Lucy, *alike?*" Harry Mack said. "Oh yes; they are twins," he ended, sardonically.

But Lucy, still refusing to notice him, said, "Oh, *do* you think I'm like Rose?" Her lip quivered. "Rose is very dear to me." She gave Lyman that timid, serious look, which always means to a young man that here at least, is a woman who understands him! "I'm grateful for those words, Doctor Holden," she said.

Harry smiled. Afterward, as he walked home with her, he said, "He swallowed it, Lucy! He swallowed it!"

"Who swallowed what?" she said. Then his mean-

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ing dawned on her and she stood still and stamped her foot. "Harry, you are simply horrid; I hate you! Nobody in the world was ever so rude as you are."

"Hold your horses," Harry commanded, calmly. "I'm not rude to you; I'm merely truthful. Nobody else dares to be."

"He's head over heels in love with Rose," she said. "Oh Harry, I hate Rose! She's so everlasting good! Sometimes I think I'd like to write a letter to her and tell her so—and not sign my name."

"I almost wish you would," Harry said, sighing; "*that* would cure me. I can stand your flirting and your temper and your fibbing, but sneakiness would finish me. Look here; Rose *is* good, so keep your claws off Holden, you little harpy! Lucy, I think I'm coming into something pretty good on an oil well."

"Oil is awfully vulgar."

"You wouldn't think it was vulgar if it gave you a handsome house out on the Hill road."

"I wouldn't live in Old Chester for anything."

"You'll have to if you live with me."

"But I'm not going to live with you. Harry, Doctor Holden is good-looking, isn't he?"

"I suppose by day after tomorrow you'll tell him so? Well, he seems to have a strong stomach; If you told me I was good-looking, I'd—"

"Don't worry! I never shall."

"Lucy, look here: *I* know what a wicked little thing you are; you've never pulled the wool over my eyes, with your 'gratitude for my words'! Yet none of your 'betters' (oh, Lucy, what a humbug you are!)

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will ever love you as I do. Lucy! Listen: Say you'll marry me."

She had plainly not been listening, but she laughed (they were almost at her father's door) and looked around at him. "What! Still proposing?"

"I am, and I shall continue to propose until I get you."

"Why on earth do you want me?" she pondered, good-naturedly.

"Upon my soul, I don't know!" Harry said. "I sometimes wonder at it myself. Perhaps I want the chance to pay you back for all you've made me suffer. I guess," he said, grinning, "I want to beat you, Lucy."

"Let's see," she retorted; "you can use a stick no bigger than your thumb, can't you? Well, I'll never take you, Harry dear." And with that sunny chuckle of hers she slipped into the house, banging the door in his face.

Harry grew a little pale—which made his freckles plainer than ever—but he set his jaw, and said to himself, "I'll get her yet!"

It was after that that young Holden "hurried up." And everybody said to everybody else, "They're made for each other!"—and waited for the engagement to be announced. But the announcement didn't come as soon as we expected. . . .

"You see," Rose told the doctor, "you really don't know me very well—I'm just an old-maid school-marm," she warned him, laughing.

They were in the empty church. Rose's school down in the basement was over, and she had gone up to the organ loft to replace a borrowed hymn book;

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then she slipped into a pew and sat down. She wanted to be alone; solitude was almost impossible at her cousin Maria's, where the little Charleses clung to her like limpets. But here, in the silent church that smelled of bibles and old carpet, she could think without interruption, and her thoughts were doubtful and happy by turns. For, like all Old Chester, Rose knew what was going to happen; but she didn't know whether she wanted it to happen. She liked his handsome face — eager — impulsive — good-natured! She liked his straightforwardness. "And he *is* fond of me," she thought: "and I'm fond of him; so why *do* I back and fill this way? Is it because I'm too old to be wildly in love,—or because I don't feel sure how deep it goes with him?"

On this particular day Lyman, having made up his mind to tell her how deep it went, came after school hours to walk home with her, and, finding the basement room deserted, felt his way up the dark, twisting staircase into the cool dimness of the church. The September afternoon was falling into dusk, but the sun still touched the stained-glass borders of the windows, and there were pools of red and violet and blue on the worn carpet on the chancel steps. Lyman, stumbling up the winding stairs, pushed open the door and entered, and there was Rose, in the very pew in which he had seen her that first Sunday.

"Why! how did you find your way up here?" she said.

"The door was unfastened," he told her; and came and sat down beside her, one arm along the back of the pew in front of them, and his laughing eyes looking into hers. "I wanted to see you,—dear," he said—and

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even her white throat flushed at that word! ("Oh, he's—he's *going to*! I'll have to make up my mind!" she was thinking, in a panic.) So she talked, hurriedly, of the weather, and how soon Doctor King's vacation would be over; then he reminded her of that first day when he had seen her here in this pew, with all Charles' children; and she said the eldest, Charlie, was an imp!

"He took the feather out of my new hat and pinned it on his kite, 'to help it to fly.' Wasn't it cunning in him? I wanted to shake him!"

But he wouldn't talk about the imp. He talked about himself and his practice. Then, suddenly:

"Rose, I'll work my hands off to make you happy and give you everything you want, if you'll just . . . Oh, Rose, don't you think—*don't* you think you could love me—a little?"

Rose, holding her lip between her teeth, stared at the pools of light on the carpet until they blurred and ran together. Except for the flutter of wings in the ivy round a tilted window, the church was very still.

"But I want you to know all about me," he said, soberly. "I did, once or twice, when I was in college, think I was in love with girls. I suppose when I was young I was a susceptible idiot. But I never was really in love. I see that now."

The shamefaced directness of that pleased her. "I never cared for anybody before," she said; then saw the admission in her words, and added, hurriedly, that he didn't really know her. "I'm just a schoolmarm! There are lots of girls you would like better. . . . I've watched you with Lucy Hayes," she said, and laughed.

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"You think I like her?" he said, dismayed.

"Well, yes; I think you do," Rose said; then added, as if eager to protect his intelligence—"but that's only because you don't know her! And when she says pleasant things to you . . ."

"Flatters me, you mean?"

"I suppose that's what it amounts to—you believe her. Probably any man would. Men are so—simple! But never mind that. And Lucy doesn't mean any harm. She's just a nice little humbug! I like her. But I—I'm sort of—schoolmarmy, I'm afraid!" She smiled, rather ruefully; then, to make time, she said, "Doctor Holden, why do you think you love me?"

He laughed at the absurdity of the question. "In the first place, I don't 'think'—I *know*. And as to 'why?'—why, because you are Rose! That's reason enough." Then he saw his chance. "Why do you love me?"

"I haven't said I do."

"But you do."

"Oh—dear!" said Rose, in laughing despair, "I *don't* believe I'm the kind of girl for you to marry! But—but—"

"But you do!" he said again, triumphantly. "At least—at least, I hope you do?" He began to quake. "Oh, Rose, please do!" He suddenly lost his self-confidence and was scared. Perhaps he was going to lose her?

Neither of them spoke. The church had darkened, and the little pools of light were swallowed by the

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rising tide of dusk. Then Rose, who had fallen very grave, smiled.

"Oh, I will try and make you happy!" she said.

In amazed triumph—for there had been a really frightened moment—he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"I've got you—I've got you!" he said,—and her silent, answering thrill, showed her that she was *not* too old to be "wildly" in love!

CHAPTER II

AS neither Lyman nor Rose had any money to speak of, it was obvious that they couldn't be married very soon, so when the engagement was at last announced, the realization that the school wouldn't lose her immediately, gave an added warmth to Old Chester's congratulations. Harry Mack was not interested in the school, but his congratulations were really hot. Charles Welwood and his wife said they were "pleased"; but they said it a little pensively, because it did seem selfish, Charles said, for Rose to look forward to going off and leaving Mr. and Mrs. Ezra in their old age—"though Edith and I will be here as much as we can," Charles said.

"I'm sure you will!" said Rose, dryly.

Lucy Hayes's congratulations were without any qualifying criticism. She said it was perfectly wonderful! "They are made for each other! Everybody's tickled to death that they're engaged. Well, I'm glad Rose is happy. . . . I'm awfully unhappy myself," she told Edith Welwood, "because Harry bothers me to death. Heaven knows it isn't my fault that he's silly about me! I hate his freckles—I couldn't possibly marry a man with freckles!—but all the same it worries me to have him talk as he does. He says awful things, and I'm so afraid he'll do something desperate."

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"I wouldn't worry," Edith consoled her; "Harry is so bad tempered he'll never hurt himself; and his mother says he keeps on saying he'll get you, yet! But he's furious at you, now."

"He'll get over being furious when he hears that Rose has caught Dr. Holden," Lucy said, with an ironic chuckle. "He was scared to death because he thought the doctor cast an eye in my humble direction!"

"Why, the idea!" said Edith.

As Lucy said, everybody was pleased. When Doctor King came home, and Lyman went back to Mercer, it was with the warm consciousness that a whole little community was interested in him, and anxious for his success. Lucy, whenever she met him—which was quite frequently, because she spent most of that winter with an aunt of hers in Mercer—Lucy always told him how proud Old Chester was of him! "It isn't only Rose who thinks you're wonderful, because she's wildly in love! Everybody does. I do, too."

Lyman was not displeased to hear that a pretty girl thought him wonderful. What being who wears trousers would be displeased? But once, after Harry Mack had heard Lucy gush to the doctor, he almost paid her a compliment: "Lucy, I swear you can pile it on thicker than anybody I ever knew, and not believe a word you say,—and yet a man will swallow it!"

I think Henry was wrong. Dr. Holden didn't entirely swallow it, and Lucy did believe what she was saying. Lyman Holden attracted her; as for why he attracted her—you might as well say why did she attract Harry? There isn't any "why" when it

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comes to falling in love! At any rate, *I* believe that, for the first time in her life, little Lucy knew what love meant. It may not have been a very deep love—a pint pot can't hold a quart; but if it holds a pint it is doing all that can be expected of it. Lucy loved as much as she could; and when the pint pot of her heart was full to overflowing she held it to Lyman Holden's lips.

But at first, she herself didn't know what had happened to her, or what she wanted. She only knew that she was restless and unhappy and that she liked to meet Doctor Holden. It was after she had met him half a dozen times—that she began deliberately to talk to him of Rose—always with admiration! This marks the time when she did know what had happened to her and took steps to get what she wanted: to admire Rose was to pay tribute to the doctor's wonderful intelligence in having chosen Rose—but when you pay tribute, you expect to get something in return! . . . Lyman, accepting the fact of his “wonderfulness” as simply as a cat accepts cream, offered in return, a real appreciation of Lucy's generosity toward Rose—for of course he was not thirty-three, and very sympathetic, *and a doctor*, for nothing! He knew that Lucy was attracted by him—“yet she loves Rose!” he thought;—“that's really very fine in her.” And he began to like Lucy for her nobility of mind! Sometimes on his occasional Saturday-night visits to Old Chester, Lyman spoke of her to Rose, and Rose said, good-naturedly, “Yes, Lucy's a nice little thing, in spite of being a dreadful flirt—and a fibber, too, I'm afraid.” Feeling that way about her, of course Rose did not see that Lucy made the

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sort of appeal which, to a friendly mind like Lyman's is so peculiarly pitiful—a clinging self-abnegation, combined with intelligent admiration. She was as simple with him, he thought, as confiding and as humble as a child, but as appreciative as a woman—"a mighty intelligent woman!"

Lucy grew thin about that time; her eyes, blue and brilliant, seemed bigger than ever, and her lips had a pitiful droop. She looked so ill that Harry Mack, quite pale under his freckles, actually went to William King about her, and said:

"Damn it! Lucy Hayes is going to die!"

"Die?" said Doctor King. "Not Lucy! That kind doesn't die."

Of course Lyman was stupid. Most decent men are stupid about this sort of thing. Lyman was so stupid that when he recognized what he called "silliness," he tried (like Lucy herself with Harry Mack) to "help her get over it" by kindness. His opportunities for kindness were mostly confined to Mercer, where he accepted occasional invitations from her aunt to come to supper. When he was in Old Chester he never thought of her—unless he saw her at church, where he always went with Rose, keeping his thumb on his half of the hymn book, and singing, in a pleasant bass, all the hymns that Unitarians never dream of singing! But it was astonishing how frequently, on his journeys to and from Old Chester, Lucy was journeying too! And when he found her in the coach, of course he was "kind." . . .

So it was that there came an April Saturday when there were no other passengers in the old stage. When Lyman got in at Mercer, he said: "Why, Miss Lucy!

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"You going to Old Chester, too?" And she said, "Well, this *is* a surprise!" He sat down with his back to the horses; she, muffled in her blue cloak, was in the opposite corner. It would have been natural to talk, but he read his paper, and she looked out of the window into the soft April afternoon. Twice he glanced at her and frowned; but she never looked in his direction; she just turned toward him that gently hollowed cheek which had filled Harry with alarm.

It takes a good while for two fat old horses to pull a creaking, rocking stage for twenty muddy miles. And a twenty-mile silence may become clamorous with things unsaid. It must have been at the end of the eighth mile that Lyman could not endure the consciousness (not the sight, for he tried not to look at her) that once in a while Lucy lifted a furtive hand and brushed something from her cheek. And he may have heard her sigh; and once, or perhaps twice, he must have known that she caught her breath in a small, broken sob. Suddenly he flung his newspaper down on the seat beside him, and stared out of the window. Then he looked at her.

"I can't bear to see you unhappy! Miss Lucy, please—please don't cry."

"I'm not crying."

"Yes, you are. I wish I could help you! Won't you tell me what is the matter?" He unhooked the swinging back of the seat across the middle of the stage, stepped over, and sat down on the narrow center bench, directly opposite Lucy. He bent toward her, his hands clasped between his knees; he was frowning with concern. He must have known that

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he was playing with fire, but he was entirely honest in his wish to stamp out the flames that were scorching poor little Lucy. "Don't cry," he said, trying to take her hand.

Instantly she cringed as if he had struck her. "Don't touch me!" she said; then, even as he drew back, frightened at the fierceness of that cry, she caught at his hand and dragged it to her lips. "You mustn't touch me! Because—because I love you." But as she clung to his sharply withdrawing hand the coach swayed and jolted, and somehow she seemed to be flung upon his knee and against his breast.

There was a silent instant; he felt her sobbing breath on his neck—her little quivering body against him. Even while his mind recoiled his arms caught her, held her—his lips were on her face. She clung to him in panting silence. Then, abruptly, her whole body relaxed; she seemed to slip out of his arms, and crumple up, and slide down upon the floor at his feet. . . . Of course he lifted her—"You're faint!" he said. For a minute she was just a sick girl to him.

But she said, in a whisper, "No, no; I'm not fainting."

With great gentleness he guided her back into her corner of the coach; then sat beside her until, with long, sobbing breaths, she seemed to get herself together. They neither of them spoke. The tornado of passion had blown itself out; it had not lasted five minutes.

Then Doctor Holden said, "You are overtired."

She shook her head. "No. . . . You will tell Rose." . . .

"Of course I won't!"

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"She doesn't love you as much as I do."

"Lucy! You only imagine that you—"

His voice broke with the pity of it. In the cavernous dusk of the coach he saw her little white face turning toward him; she had pulled her blue cloak over her lips to hide their trembling, and her eyes, wild with suffering and adoration, looked straight into his:

"I don't mind if *you* despise me—"

"But I don't despise you!"

"—I don't mind at all; but I won't have her . . ."

"I sha'n't speak of it; it was nothing. Just a fancy—"

"No, not a fancy. I love you. And I don't care if you despise me, because"—her voice shook with agonized triumph—"because *you kissed me!*"

"I oughtn't to have; I am awfully ashamed! You'll never forgive me! I can't forgive myself!"

"There is nothing to forgive. I shall live on it."

They did not speak again until the stage drew up at the tavern door, and Lyman Holden, reaching for his bag and umbrella, said, in a low voice, "Good night."

When he went upstairs to his room in the tavern he was tingling all over. He lit the lamp on the little center table, then stood still and tried to get his bearings. He had said he wouldn't tell Rose, and of course he wouldn't—that is, he wouldn't tell her who the girl was, who had—done it; but he must tell her what *he* had done. He must tell Rose that he had kissed a frantic love-sick girl—"I took advantage of her," he thought, acutely humiliated. Yet, even in his disgusted mortification, he felt again that clinging weight

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against his breast, and those panting lips hot upon his own. Mechanically he began to remove the dust of the journey; he was in a hurry to wash his face—to wash away the velvet touch of that cheek pressed against his.

"Oh!" he said to himself, with a sort of groan, "I'm a double-barreled idiot! If only I hadn't kissed her! How *can* I tell Rose?"

He was so ashamed—and scared too, for perhaps Rose wouldn't understand how a man can kiss one girl when he is dead in love with another girl—that for a minute he thought, "I'll not tell her!" But of course he knew he would tell her. The only thing was, how should he do it? How does one tell a thing like that? In the first place, the infernal caddishness of *telling* that a girl has kissed you! You can clear her—at least a doctor can—by putting her kisses down to "crisis of nerves"; but you can't say you had a crisis of nerves yourself!

In his effort to think this out, Lyman was late in reaching Mrs. Barkley's—and there was Rose waiting for him at the gate. She snuggled her arm in his, and said: "Let's take a walk; I must tell you Charles's latest piousity!" Charles's piousities were a source of wicked joy to Rose, and Lyman was always eager to hear them. But now, as they strolled along the River Road in the April dusk, and she told her story, and Lyman said, rather absently, a word which made her laugh, (but would have shocked the pious Charles!) he did not seem much amused. Then Rose said that little Charlie was the dearest little monkey!—and began a story about him: "When he heard the thunder yesterday he said it was God, growling,"

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said Rose; at which poor, preoccupied Lyman did laugh a little. But all the while she was talking, he was trying to get a word in about "nerves"; but how can you talk about another girl's nerves when you've got your arm around your own girl's waist? As they turned back, Rose said: "Now tell me about yourself! Got any nice, new, rich old lady patients?" . . . He might have perhaps lugged in "nerves," here; but kisses didn't seem inevitable with old ladies; so he only said, ruefully, that rich patients were scarce; and added to himself, "If only I could forget the little idiot!"

But you can't "forget" to order; and the more you want to, the more you don't. Lyman had thirty-six hours in Old Chester, and it seemed to him that never in one single minute of one single hour did he "forget" the five fierce minutes in the old coach. After a placid family evening at Mrs. Ezra's he went back to the tavern, saying he was tired; but his wakeful and remembering night did not rest him very much. He went to church the next morning, and there, too, he *remembered*; he sat beside Rose, not hearing a word Doctor Lavendar said, but hearing again and again Lucy's assertion that she "would live" on what had happened. And, hearing it, an honest and horrified vanity would run like wine in his veins! . . . When, coming out of church William King touched him on the shoulder, and said: "Holden, I want you to give a look at a patient of mine this afternoon—if Rose will let you off. Will you, Rosa Mundi?" he had a sense of escape; he would have a little more time to think out just how he would tell Rose.

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After dinner (there had been no chance for confidences before dinner, with all the Charleses swarming about!) when the lovers went out to the gate to wait for William King's buggy, Lyman said to himself that this business of having a secret from Rose was darned uncomfortable. For by that time reaction from the flattery of the gift of unasked love from a pretty girl had set in; it came in the form of a bleak consciousness that Lucy had made a fool of him.

"I was an ass," he thought. "And I hate secrets! But what chance have I had to tell her? Everybody's always hanging round!" Then William appeared, and Lyman, climbing into the buggy, told Rose he would come back as soon as he could. . . . "What's the case?" he said.

"Temper, I guess," Doctor King said; "she has a quick little temper. They sent for me at eleven o'clock last night. She got to screaming. It's Lucy Hayes; she . . ."

"What!"

"Yes. Hysterics;—that's all right! I don't mind *that*. But . . ." Then he went into various symptoms, to which the younger man listened silently. "You boys are more up on treating these monkeyshines than old fogies like me," said Willy King. "When the 'cup of cold water' in their face fails, I'm plumb bothered to know whether to let 'em alone, or what."

"It's bothering," Doctor Holden said.

"Lucy's a tyke," said William, "but she's no fool. So I feel pretty sure she's had some sort of a shock, and it's thrown things out of kilter. Maybe Harry Mack's been tormenting her again. But *I* can't find out what's happened! Well, it occurred to me that

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you, being almost a stranger, might get at the root of it."

"Does she know I'm coming?"

"Oh, she put it into my head," William said, chuckling. Lyman frowned. "She was very polite, of course, and said I was a 'wonderful doctor'; but if I wouldn't mind, she'd like to see Doctor Holden, because 'it seemed friendly to darling Rose to show appreciation,' I wonder what she's got against Rose—she loves her so much? I said I didn't mind calling you in, in the least. I hope you'll send a big bill."

Lyman Holden's face was slowly reddening. He felt a sudden healthy irritation at Lucy, yet there was no way of getting out of her trap without betraying her; if he refused to go on to the Hayes house, Doctor King might do some guessing.

"I don't want to see the little goose," he thought, really frightened. "Of course, I understand; it was just nerves. And it was a compliment, I suppose in a way. But damn it! what shall I do if she gets going again?" Then he said some vague thing about a stranger being able, sometimes, to do more for a nervous patient than a friend could.

"Exactly!" said William. "When you've been in practice as long as I have you'll have that rubbed into you. Well, I'll take you upstairs and let you try your hand on her."

In spite of his irritation at the trap, Lyman's "hand" was very gentle. When he and Doctor King and Mrs. Hayes entered the girl's room she was lying on her face; he saw her quiver as she heard his voice; and when, in his very best "bedside manner," he said, "Good afternoon, Miss Lucy," she was suddenly

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rigid. She made no reply; just lay on her face, motionless.

"Oh, Lucy dear," Mrs. Hayes entreated, stroking her daughter's shoulder, "*do* speak to the doctor!"

Lucy, her face turned away from Doctor Holden, scowled at her mother, who whimpered; but when Lyman made a little motion of dismissal, Mrs. Hayes, on the verge of tears, meekly followed Doctor King out of the room.

Still Lucy did not speak. Apparently she was waiting until the sound of William's ponderously retreating steps and her mother's trickle of worried talk should be broken off by the closing of her bedroom door. . . . When everything was quiet she gave a long sigh, turned her head, sat up, and looked at Lyman.

"I wanted to see you."

Her face twitched so with pain that his angry annoyance vanished in real concern. "Poor little thing!" he thought. "I'm afraid you're tired, Miss Lucy. You have been overdoing."

She smiled. "You think I'm troubled because of yesterday? I'm not. Not in the least."

"Of course not! No reason to be. Only, I want you to rest, and . . ."

"I asked Doctor King to have you come, because I wanted you to know"—she pressed her clasped hands hard against her throbbing throat; her lips smiled, but he saw that her eyes were blurring with tears—"I wanted you to know I am not unhappy. I knew you would think I was, and that would trouble you. And I didn't want you to be troubled. I couldn't bear that! But I am not unhappy. A girl in love is happy, whether she's loved back again or not." Two big,

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bright tears brimmed over and rolled slowly down her face. "It's enough to give. *I kissed you.* Don't dislike me."

"Dislike you? I could never dislike you!" Lyman was provoked, but moved; how could he have doubted the reality of her feeling for him? Pain is a horribly sincere thing, and Lucy Hayes was suffering. To this sympathetic young man the sight of her pain blotted out his personal dismay and left nothing but a thrill of—well, he didn't know exactly what. And to the appeal of pain came the quick answer of protecting pity. "Miss Lucy, I am honored by your regard! Please believe that I am *honored!*"

She nodded; then she said, in a whisper: "I was sure you wouldn't despise me, because you are not like other men. No; I'm not ashamed to love a man like you."

Then she was silent, and he tried, desperately, to find something to say: "We—we didn't have rain today, after all," he began; "and bright weather will be good for—"

"Always, always, I shall think of you," Lucy said. "Rose couldn't mind *that*. But she would mind if she knew you kissed me. Don't let her find out. Don't tell her that I . . ."

"I shouldn't dream of telling her about you," he said; and even through the dismay of the moment he had a sudden honest satisfaction in knowing that his Rose, when he should tell her about himself, would never try to "find out" who the girl was! However, he couldn't go into that with Lucy; he got up and said: "I do truly appreciate what you've said, and it's just between you and me. We won't ever speak

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of it again, Miss Lucy; but you'll count on my friendship?—and Rose's, too! Now we must find some medicine to make you stronger."

She smiled faintly and shook her head.

"You must be very quiet," he said, with elaborate cheerfulness, "and eat some supper. Promise me!" he commanded.

She said, very pitifully, like a little sick child: "Yes, if you want me to. I'll do anything you want."

Lyman stepped to the door and called, *very* cheerfully, "Doctor King!"

When William King came and the two doctors stood by the bed where Lucy lay, very still, eyes closed, slow tears welling up and rolling down her cheeks, the young doctor looked over at the older doctor and said that their patient had evidently been overdoing; "I am afraid we must tell Mrs. Hayes to scold her a little!" Then he suggested a prescription. But as he and William went jogging back to Rosa Mundi he felt again the hot velvet of those childlike lips on his own; and by and by he became so silent that William chuckled to himself; after all, old fogies do have a few merits. They don't feel that the world is shaking because a chit like Lucy Hayes sheds a few crocodile tears! "The boy takes her monkeyshines seriously," William thought, much amused.

Certainly Lyman took Lucy seriously enough to find it increasingly difficult to tell Rose his experience in the stage; and then, with all those Welwoods around, there was he said to himself, "really no opportunity to tell her! I'll have to write to her about it," he thought. . . .

CHAPTER III

LYMAN had not the slightest intention of concealing anything from Rose; indeed, as soon as he got back to Mercer he tried to put on paper, his part of that unpleasant journey in the coach. As he sat in his office, waiting for improbable patients, again and again he endeavored to write the thing out. But he couldn't seem to do it. In the first place, he hated to let Rose know what a fool he had been—and then, also, once in a while, alternating with mortification at himself and irritation at Lucy, would come a wave of tenderness for the little clinging thing—straining against him in the stage, or looking up at him with truthful tear-blinded eyes as she lay on her bed. It was that faint tenderness which made it so difficult to write to Rose! It was like betraying poor, pitiful Lucy—even though he would not, of course, mention her name. Still, every day, he took up his pen resolutely, and started in by telling Rose how much he loved her. . . . Then a new paragraph: he wanted to tell her something “it was of no importance,” only he wanted her to know everything that happened to him. A young lady “whose name he must not mention,”—had suddenly shown a streak of sentimentality, which meant nothing whatever; but he had . . . “quite accidentally”—No, no, no! Then another sheet of paper: “he had, without in the least meaning to, just to com-

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fort her"—"Oh, my *Lord!*" poor Lyman groaned. The thought of Rose's astonishment at his weakness was like a trickle of cold water running down his back. "I swear, I won't tell her! Why should I tell her? Confound it, I've got to tell her! If it was just that poor little thing's performance, I would never open my head about it." But, of course, his own "performance" made all the difference.

After having thrown a dozen sheets of paper in his scrap basket he gave it up. "It can't be written. I've got to tell her."

The purpose of doing so made the prospect of his next Old Chester visit a nightmare. The mere verbal difficulty of confession was appalling, because what he had to say must be said without extenuating particulars as to solitude and a swaying coach and a jolt that almost threw the unnameable young lady into his arms; details of that kind would almost certainly lead Rose to guess who "the young lady" was! But worse than that, infinitely more worrying, was the anxiety as to how Rose would take what he had to tell her about himself. "*Can* she understand?" Would any girl understand? No; probably not! But that didn't make any difference; the next time he went to Old Chester he would have to tell her, and abide by the consequences.

But before this next visit of his, Lucy had done some telling on her own account. She came, one rainy May evening, and knocked at Mrs. Ezra Barkley's door. Mrs. Charles admitted her, very languid, and inclined to be weepy, "because," she said, motioning Lucy to a seat and curling herself up on the sofa, "I am so sadly weak. I can't even take care of the

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little ones. So Aunt is looking after them; they are playing horse in her room upstairs. Hear them?"

"Hear them? My dear, I am not deaf!" said Lucy, letting her blue cloak slip over the back of her chair. "How can you stand 'em, Edith?"

"Oh, Rose and Aunt Maria love to take care of them, while I am—in my condition. But I suppose I oughtn't to speak of *that*, before you?"

"Good heavens! *Another?*" said Lucy; then glanced at the ceiling. "The plaster will come down."

Edith was not concerned about the plaster. "Oh, Lucy, it is dreadful for a mother's heart, to see her children watched over by others!"

"I should think it would be an immense relief," Lucy said. "I hate children; when they are little, they smell of sour milk; and when they get older, they yell so. Rose seems to be fond of them."

Her voice dropped into a sigh at Rose's name.

Mrs. Charles said yes, Rose adored the children. "Well, they *are* wonderful children!"

"Oh," said Lucy, dropping the little Welwoods, "I wish I was dead."

Edith was so startled that she put her feet down on the floor and sat up, raising vague hands to tighten her slipping, straggling locks of hair. "You 'wish you were dead'? Why, the idea! You, with a rich father!"

"'Rich father'! Money doesn't buy happiness, Edith."

"Well, it buys shoes," said Mrs. Charles. "Dear Charles has had to give up his position in Mercer on account of his eyes. We shall visit Aunt Maria until he is better. Oh, I tell you what, Lucy, if you had

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six children who scuffle as they walk you would be glad of a rich father."

"I wouldn't have six children," said Lucy. "Edith," she added, abruptly, "I want your advice."

"Mine?" said Edith, in honest astonishment; no one had ever been known to want Edith's advice!

"I am in love," Lucy said.

"Oh, *is* it Harry?" said Edith clasping her hands.

"Heavens, no! If there wasn't another man in the world I wouldn't take Harry. This man is—quite different. And he's in love with me, but—he's engaged to somebody else. That's the horrid part of it."

"Why, the idea!" said Edith.

"Don't you think," said Lucy, tensely, "That he ought to ask the girl to release him?"

"But Lucy,—a *man* to break his engagement!"

"If he's in love with me, it breaks itself, doesn't it?" Lucy said; "and I know he's in love with me because—he kissed me."

Mrs. Charles made a gesture of delighted horror. "*Kissed you?* When he's engaged to another young lady? Why, the idea!"

Lucy dropped her face in her hands. "What am I going to do? He kissed me, kissed me—kissed me! Doesn't that mean he loves me? If the girl he's engaged to knew that—she'd throw him over, wouldn't she?"

"I should think," said Edith, with a flash of uncommon sense, "she'd be glad to. But, oh, Lucy, you must both of you conquer your affections. Why, if this other girl guessed, she'd break with him at once!"

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"I wish she'd 'guess,' then," Lucy said. "Oh dear, I'd like to write to her and tell her . . . and not sign my name. Of course I won't, but I'm not sure that it isn't a real duty—just to let her know. For what worries me is that he may think he must be true to her—when he doesn't love her! All that is poppycock; a man can't do a girl a worse turn than to keep his engagement when he doesn't love her!"

This, for Old Chester, was very advanced thought, but Edith could not controvert it, because at that minute Rose, with little Charlie tugging at her hand, came in, like a breath of fresh sweet wind. All Edith could do was to see Lucy to the door, and kiss her, and tell her to "cheer up!" But she was truly staggered. In those days, in love affairs, the poor scarecrow of "honor" permitted (reluctantly) a girl to break her engagement, but it kept a man to his word, and thereby invited the crows to descend on many fair fields of matrimony. So, to Edith's way of thinking, the only thing for Lucy to do was to "conquer her affection." But she was so stirred by this talk in the dusk, while the little Charleses whooped and stamped overhead, that after supper,—Rose and Mrs. Ezra having put all the babies to bed—she nearly burst with mysterious hints. ("I will never betray a confidence," she told herself, solemnly), but—"I have been asked," she informed the family generally, "to advise a friend. It is very difficult for me to do so."

Rose, sitting at the big, rosewood table, marking spelling lists by the light of an astral lamp which had prisms dangling from the red-glass bowl, looked up

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and laughed. "I shouldn't suppose Lucy would take kindly to advice," she said.

"I didn't say it was Lucy," Edith said, primly; "I name no names. But I feel a great responsibility in giving advice. I suppose I am too sensitive. I wonder how you would all feel about it? It was the case of an engaged gentleman who was in love with another—"

"Was the 'other' in love with him?" Rose asked, drolly.

"I fear, I greatly fear she is—"

"'Is?'" said Rose. "I thought this was a tale of the dim past."

"I don't know just how long ago it happened," said Edith—"I mean the gentleman's change of feeling. But I hope I did wisely to say I thought he must not break his engagement; he must be faithful to his first love—"

"Good gracious!" said Rose; "if he's in love with the 'other,' the milk's spilled!"

"But, Rose, darling," Mrs. Ezra said, mildly horrified, "a gentleman cannot break his engagement to a young lady!"

"I'm sorry for the young lady if he doesn't," Rose said.

At which Charles, who was pasting pressed flowers into a "keepsake" for his aunt Maria, said, gravely, that Edith, as a married woman, was better fitted to have an opinion upon such a delicate matter than Rose. "A man stands by his word of honor," said Charles.

"And how do you suppose a girl would feel to

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have him 'stand by,' if she knew he didn't want to?" Rose said, good naturedly.

"If the young lady was aware of the change in his affections," said Mrs. Ezra, trying to keep the peace, "she would wish to release him, of course; but—"

" 'Release' him?" said Rose; "Heavens! I should think the only thing that would trouble her would be that she couldn't get to the front door fast enough to open it for him—and say '*good-by!*' "

Rose always stored up the Welwood's solemnities to tell Lyman; but the next time he came down for a Sunday in Old Chester (a few days after Lucy's twilight call) she almost forgot to repeat their fine sentiments as to faithfulness. She saw, as soon as he arrived, that he was too preoccupied for that sort of talk. . . .

She was in the school room, hurrying to get through correcting our compositions, and not expecting to see Lyman until he came, as usual, to have supper at Mrs. Ezra's. But even while she was reading our opinions about "Spring," and "The Future," and "George Washington," she was listening for the wheels of the stage that would be carrying him to the tavern, where he would hurry to change a coat or a collar, and then rush up to Mrs. Ezra's. But the stage, instead of jolting on down the street, stopped at the church, and as Rose raised her head, surprised and listening, she heard his step on the path, and the next moment he had opened the basement door and was in the school room.

"Why, Lyman!" she exclaimed, springing up. "I thought you would go to the tavern!"

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"I wanted to see you first," he said—"I mean without people around." He drew a chair up beside hers on the little platform. "Compositions?" he said.

"Yes; oh Lyman, they are so funny! Let me read you—"

"I want to talk to you."

She pushed her papers away, and, leaning her elbow on the desk, looked at him—a smiling, fragrant thing, with the clear, hot color in her cheeks, and sweet, humorous eyes.

"Something bothering you?" she said.

"Yes; it's nothing; and yet—it does bother me, Rose."

"I've felt you were worried, in your letters."

"I tried to write to you about it, but I thought I'd rather tell you. It's nothing, really. I'm making a mountain out of a molehill! But I hate secrets."

"So do I. But, Lyman, dear, if you want to keep a secret from me, I don't mind in the least!"

"But I *don't* want to. I want to tell you."

"Then go ahead."

"Perhaps you'll be disgusted with me. I'm disgusted with myself."

She laughed. "I don't think you need worry."

So Lyman, red and miserable and ashamed and frightened, began his confession. He did not look at Rose; he sat with his hands in his pockets and his legs stretched out under her desk. He was so keenly conscious of being a pup in intimating that a lady had shown him a favor, that he scuffled his feet as badly as any of the little Welwoods, and upset the scrap basket. Rose said, "Never mind!" but he grasped at the respite of a moment to stoop down and pick up the

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pieces of paper. Then he began again, still without looking at her. That was why as his mortifying story went on, he did not see in her eyes that mixture of pain and amusement and tenderness, which comes into the faces of mothers when a child confesses some little naughtiness; nor did he see a sudden shock of understanding that drove the tenderness out of her face. He was as guarded as any man could be—but her guess was inevitable. *Lyman* was the man of the story Lucy had told to Edith! So Lucy must have been the girl! Rose, listening, hardly knew whether to laugh or burst into impatient disgust. “She’s only a horrid little flirt,” Rose thought; but, really, *this* was too much! To throw herself into a man’s arms! Rose’s kind mouth was contemptuous. But Lyman, still not looking at her, was trying to tell her just how it happened:

“We were alone, and she seemed to be unhappy. She’s a girl I hardly know, Rose; almost a stranger. She was crying. ‘Course I was sorry for her, and I said something—I can’t remember just what—and before I knew what she was talking about, she said (I feel like a confounded cad, Rose) something about—ah—liking me, you know. And then she—she, sort of—kissed me. Well—that’s nothing. I don’t mind *that*.”

“Of course it was nothing,” she agreed. “Good gracious! Lyman, you don’t suppose I would blame you for the silly thing’s behavior?”

“No; I knew you wouldn’t. But that isn’t what bothers me. She was just a little goose. An attack of nerves, you know. But I—well, before I knew it, I kissed her. I didn’t meant to, but—”

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She put her two hands over his, clasped between his knees. "My dear," she said, and kissed him; "it was her fault, not yours."

"Oh, but, Rose, it *was* my fault! because I took advantage of a crazy minute; I am awfully ashamed of myself."

"Don't think of it again," she said. "I sha'n't."

He knelt down beside her, putting his arms around her waist, and laying his face on her shoulder. "Rose! Oh, you *do* understand!"

"Of course I understand, Lyman. Did you think I was such a—an old maid that I wouldn't understand?"

"I wouldn't have told you about it if it had been only her affair. I mean *her* part of it was of no consequence. But I—"

"Her part was the whole thing!" Rose said; and suddenly she was angry.

"No," he insisted; "she was just silly. And also she is a very outspoken person. One of those frank people, you know, who can't conceal—" Rose, laying her cheek against his hair, tried not to laugh; but he went on, taking all the blame upon himself. "I hardly know her. She is like a child, very simple and candid. So her ridiculous outbreak, which she has no doubt forgotten by this time, doesn't mean anything. But that I—"

"I know, Lyman. I know."

"And you forgive me?"

"Lyman! There isn't any such word between us."

"Oh, Rose, you are a wonderful woman!"

"No I'm not!" she said. "I'm mad enough at—at this creature, whoever she is! But of course I

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know it means nothing at all, so far as you and I are concerned." Rose was all good humor and common sense, and love,—but she was entirely human. She was saying to herself that she'd like to tell Lucy Hayes what she thought of her! But to Lyman she only said, "it's nothing! We'll never think of it again."

And he said, "No—never."

And from that moment they both thought of it constantly—she with a deliberate purpose of protecting him ("because men are such geese about women!") and he with a faint perplexity at a forgiveness which he was grateful for, but couldn't quite understand.

They went back together to Mrs. Ezra's, and all that evening Rose was just her usual gay, handsome self; but once in a while the color deepened in her cheek, and she bit her lip. Later Lyman walked home to the tavern, telling himself over and over that Rose was wonderful! "A little cold," he thought; "but that's the way I like her—too proud to mind a silly accident like this." But he was rather pitiful of Lucy, because Rose had called her a "creature." "Lucy isn't a 'creature.' She is just frank—and very feminine. And, besides, she knew she could trust me to understand."

The flattery of this "trust" was in Lyman's mind quite frequently in the next few weeks. . . . But he tried to forget the hot velvet of Lucy's lips.

Back again in Mercer, and hard at work, Rose's "wonderfulness" continued to perplex him. "She didn't really mind my kissing Lucy," he said to him-

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self; and felt a little flat at having minded so much himself.

"Didn't mind?" . . . It was a pity he couldn't have seen Rose a week or two later, when she opened a small, square envelope, and read an anonymous letter:

The man you are engaged to kissed a girl whom he loves more than you. Better break your engagement to him.

"I'd a good deal rather have him die than fall into Lucy's hands," she said to herself, grimly. But there was not a trace of self-betraying contempt when she met Lucy here or there—found her talking to Edith in the twilight or passed her on the River Road with Harry Mack.

"Good evening Lucy," she would say; and Lucy's "Dear Rose! You look just like your name," and Rose's easy retort; "Does that mean I have thorns?"—when this sort of thing happened, Rose's voice was so pleasantly matter-of-fact that Lucy thought to herself, "*Did she get it?*" And Lucy's voice was so cordial that Rose would think: "How *can* Lyman be so fooled by her? 'Candid'? She has about as much candor as Judas! Oh, men *are* queer," Rose would think, ruefully; "Look at Harry! He's crazy about her, and yet in other ways he has lots of sense. Any woman would see through Lucy."

But Lyman, in Mercer, remembering his confession, and constitutionally unable to "see through" any female thing, said, naturally enough, "Rose didn't really mind."

As the summer waned into winter, Lyman Holden pretty much forgot Lucy. But she did not forget him—although she had a chance to, for Harry Mack

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had a bad relapse into love making, and told her, for the hundredth time that he'd get her, yet! Then he added exactly what he thought of her. Indeed, he reached such a point of insolence that she almost accepted him—but not quite; she was committed to her purpose of getting what she wanted! She occasionally saw Lyman in Mercer, but not often; he didn't accept those invitations to supper which, instigated by Lucy, the Mercer aunt sent him quite frequently; but they met in other people's houses. Sometimes Lucy talked to him, and he was uneasy, for fear she would "say things." Oftener she turned her head away and wouldn't speak to him, and then he was puzzled. Twice she went down to Old Chester in the stage with him (there were two or three other passengers) and she ignored him so completely that he wondered what he had done to displease her. "She seems to have forgotten my existence!" Once he met her walking with Harry—Harry beaming with happiness—and she did not, apparently, even see Lyman, who said to himself, frowning, "Well, I'm glad she has got over it."

Then, one February afternoon, she came into his office at the close of office hours. She had a bunch of violets in her hands, and fingered them nervously, looking at him with innocent, unhappy eyes. "You—you have begun to despise me."

"Of course I haven't! What nonsense!"

She was trembling. "I am an idiot to be here, but I am so wretched. You didn't speak to me, coming out of church yesterday."

"Why, but you didn't speak to me!" he defended himself.

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"I was afraid to," she said; "you looked sort of provoked at me."

"I thought," he said, in a low voice, "that you were provoked at *me*."

"I? Oh—oh—how can you say that? I love you! I had to come here. Thought I'd—*die* if I didn't hear your voice, today! Die! I just had to look at you—had to touch you," she said, faintly. Then she looked at him,—but did not touch him, for he backed away from her, hunting for stammering platitudes of appreciation and admonition. Suddenly she sobbed; then, as if to cover her emotion, laughed, and quickly, softly, like a mischievous child, ran to him, and pushed the wet fragrance of the violets against his face. He felt her hand on his cheek. . . . His arms went around her. . . .

A minute later, emerging from those involuntarily clasping arms, she sat down in his revolving chair at his desk, and looked at him—a look of fire and terror and complete triumph! He tried to say something about "forgetting himself. . . . You will never forgive me," he said.

"'Forgive you'? What have I to forgive? Do you think you need 'forgiveness' for loving me? You might ask it, if you didn't love me, for that would kill me."

"I'll never forgive myself!" he said, hoarsely.

They were both silent. Lyman's head swam; he saw what he had done—he had crushed a jewel under his feet. No "confession," no repentance, no despair, no excuse, could make the jewel anything but dust!

"*Now*," he said aloud, "I've lost her."

"You mean Rose? Yes, you have." She took up a

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pencil and began making scrolls and letters on the prescription blank on his desk; he saw that her fingers trembled. Then she said, very low, "She wouldn't want you—now."

Lyman's hand clenched against his mouth, smothered his shamed and despairing: "No; she wouldn't."

"*She's* proud," Lucy said. "As for me, I have no pride, no anything. Just love. I want you."

He was dumb. Lucy, looking down on the initials she had scrawled on the bit of paper, said, gently, "Lyman, would you be happier if I died?"

"Don't—don't!" he said; then, miserably, "Oh, if only I had never seen you!"

"She's a better woman than I am. But she doesn't love you as I do. Do you think she would fight to get you as I have fought? She's too angelic for love like that!"

"Yes; she *is* better than you are. Don't talk about her. And as for me—"

"Angelic," Lucy repeated, thoughtfully; "yes. But you'd rather marry me than an angel?"

He was silent.

She sprang to her feet and struck his arm with her little fist. "Wouldn't you?"

Her touch was like a push against a wavering defense of truth; he fell into the engulfing lie of passion: "Yes." . . .

Instantly she turned with a whirl and flew out of the room. It was as if she could not trust herself to speak her triumphant joy. He leaped toward her and tried to reach her—hold her!—kiss her! But she had gone, leaving her violets there on his desk.

He stood, panting. . . . She had fled, had she? She

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was trying to escape him, was she? Ah, she would find that she could never do that ! He caught up his hat, plunged into his coat and rushed out after her into the street. But she seemed to have wings ! He saw a blue flutter at her aunt's doorstep, but before he could reach it the door had closed. In answer to his impetuous ringing of the bell, he was told that she was not seeing anybody.

"Miss Lucy's done got a haidache," the woman said ; "she say to tell folks that come to see her she's gone to bed."

"Why, but she's just this minute entered the house !"

"She say she won't see *nobody*."

Lyman, half laughing, turned away. "I'll come back later," he warned the woman. "Tell her I say so !"

But he did not go back later. In his office (still faintly perfumed with her violets) he sat down, and looked at the prescription blank and his own initials—which were hers, too—"L. H." "L. H." over and over. When he saw those entwined and foolish scrawls, the impulse to catch Lucy in his arms faded into consciousness of the trampled jewel, and a cold terror of himself.

"My God !" he said, "I *mustn't* marry Rose—but have I got to marry Lucy ?"

He had no impulse, now, to struggle against the catastrophe of temperament. He had not the faintest idea of asking for Rose's forgiveness. Rose wouldn't be Rose if she could forgive him ! He wouldn't want her to ! No, it wasn't a question of forgiveness. "At least," he said to himself, "I have as much decency as *that* ; I won't ask her to forgive me. Besides, she

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couldn't. She is not that kind of woman." Sitting at his desk, his hands in his pockets, his feet stretched out in front of him, he raged at himself,—at Lucy—at himself again! Yes, he had crushed and shattered a precious thing—Rose's love. Also he had destroyed another thing—a poor thing, perhaps, but all he had to live by—namely, his own self-respect. So this was the kind of man he was? Loving Rose—calmly, perhaps, and certainly reverently—but wanting Lucy! For through all the shame, and pain, and shocked astonishment at himself, while his mind cried for Rose, his arms desired Lucy.

He sat at his desk, biting hard on a cigar that kept going out, and thinking of this incredible contradiction. He sat there until midnight. The fire in the little grate was almost out; one red coal blinked at him, then hid under a film of ashes; the cold had crept into the room; he looked up, and saw the frost on the windows, and shivered.

He must write to Rose. . . .

He got up, found some kindling, and started the fire; then sat crouching over it, holding his hands out to the flame. Sometimes he heard the frost tapping at the window, or the far-off jingle of sleigh bells; then, nearer, the creak of snow beneath a runner. He was trying to decide what words to use in telling the girl he loved, this unspeakable thing: *his desire to marry another woman!* Finally, numb and cold, he went to his desk. Lucy's violets were still there.

It took him until the greyness of dawn dulled the glow in the grate, to write that letter. When at last it was done it said practically only one thing:

He was not worthy of her.

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The rest was a detail! He loved (no, no! he "wanted") another girl; and—would Rose release him? The last words—"Of course I don't ask you to forgive me"—nearly finished Lyman. He put his face down on his arms on his desk, and said to himself that he had stabbed Rose. "And yet," he thought, bewildered, "I love her just as much as ever!"

The two lines which, later, he wrote to Lucy, made the same confession, tho' neither he nor she realized it:

"I have asked Rose to release me. I mustn't see you until she does so."

The letter to Rose went off on the morning mail. In his mind he followed it all that day. He followed the slow tug of the old coach, where it lay in the bag under Silas's feet; he followed it when Silas flung the bag off at the post office, and the bald old post mistress ran out to get it, and to cry, shrilly, that the stage was late; he followed it as, her spectacles on the end of her little red nose, she began to sort the mail with blunt, fumbling fingers. Once Rose had said, "Sometimes I want to choke dear old Minns, I'm in such a hurry for your letter!" Would she be in a hurry for this letter? "Oh, my *God!*" Lyman thought, and as he said it he had a sudden revulsion and a pang of purpose: he would rush out and telegraph old Minns and tell her to send the letter addressed to Miss Rose Knight, back to him. No! No use; Minns wouldn't do it—couldn't do it. Well, he might telegraph Rose, "Please return letter unread; will explain later." Under the frantic impetus of this thought, he looked at his watch (there was in the office at the moment that precious thing, a patient), put his hands

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on the arms of his chair, and half rose; but the gesture conveyed nothing to the fat lady sitting by his desk, drooning on about her aches and pains. "I can keep her from reading it," he was thinking, "if I rush out this instant and telegraph!" . . . "It's rheumatism," he said, mechanically. "I'll give you something." He drew his prescription pad toward him and wrote, "Please return lett"—saw what he had done, tore off the blank sheet, and wrote his cabalistic grains and ounces, not hearing a word of the symptoms the poor lady was still reciting. Again he made his dismissing gesture ("Rose will be starting for the post office in an hour. She'll wait until the mail is distributed) . . . And drink a great deal of water—" He was on his feet now, steering the patient toward the door. Yes; in an hour Rose would have opened that letter, and be reading it—there! in the post office! before people! "Oh, I ought to have guarded against *that!* I never thought of that.) . . . Yes, a teaspoonful before meals." He had got the patient to the doorstep by this time, and as she lingered—lingered—lingered—explaining in detail the difficulty of lifting her arm to brush her hair, he wanted to say, "Cut your hair off, then—or your head!" All he did say was, "Oh, that *is* uncomfortable."

Back again in his office, sitting in his desk chair, he began to tear into tiny scraps the paper with its "Please return lett—" There was no use in telegraphing. Rose would have read the letter long before a despatch could reach her; besides—why hold it back? The fact remained. . . .

Then he began to calculate as to when Rose's answer would reach him; if she wrote that night, he

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would get it the next night. But perhaps she wouldn't write? She would despise him so that she would not even answer him. He had a strange longing to rush to her, and tell her all his misery, and be comforted. The preposterousness of that thought made him almost laugh.

Five o'clock. Well; his letter had been read. . . . He was a free man. Rose had "released" him. "Good riddance; good riddance!" he thought. "She despises me, and I despise myself." But, he was free, so he could go to see Lucy,—“But I won't kiss her till Rose's letter comes.” He didn't want to kiss her; it made him sick to think of kissing her! But he put on his coat and hat and went heavily out into the snow. He found himself thinking, as he walked along in the yellow glow of the winter sunset, that it had taken only twenty-four hours to turn his life upside down. This time yesterday afternoon he had been a self-respecting man, with a calm outlook into an honorable future; now he was—what was he? “Mad, I guess,” he thought; “I wonder how I'll feel when I've married her? I'll give myself six months to get the reaction. I'll be in love for about six months, I suppose. How can I be such a fool?” he pondered; “I really *want* to marry her!” He rang Lucy's doorbell like a man in a dream.

When she came into the room he said, bleakly: “I'm free, Lucy. I've asked her to release me.”

“We can be married right off,” Lucy whispered, her head on his breast, her eyes closing as she lifted her lips to his. But he didn't kiss her; he turned away abruptly and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out of the window.

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"Not till I get her letter, saying she releases me."

Lucy, looking at the back of his head, screamed with laughter. "Oh, Lyman, you *are* absurd!" she said.

Rose's letter didn't come for five days, and each day Lyman said to Lucy: "Wait. She must release me first."

"When are we going to announce our engagement?" she said, petulantly.

And he said, "I must hear from her before we tell people what we have done."

"I hate to wait," Lucy said; "I'm so proud that you love me I want everybody to know!"

"Proud? That you are loved by a man who has jilted a fine woman, a—a noble woman! A dishonorable man;—is that anything to be proud of?"

"'Dishonorable'? Would it have been honorable to marry her when you loved me best? You do love me best?"

He hesitated. "I want you," he said.

"Old Chester will have a fit," Lucy said, chuckling; "and Harry—Good gracious!" She paused and looked at Lyman, her eyes suddenly narrowing. "Harry," she said to herself, "wouldn't have 'waited' to kiss me! And he'd have proclaimed our engagement on the housetops. . . . Well," she said, good naturedly, "all right. We won't tell people yet, if you don't want to. But Rose will tell. I'm glad I'm not in Old Chester! Harry would be horrid. You have much better manners than he has, Lyman. Lyman! I'm going to tell sister Helen. She's here with Aunty for a week; her Neddy is attending to some business for his father. Oh, Lyman, how could Helen marry Ned Dilworth? Compared to you, Ned's a

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pigmy. And you—Oh, Lyman!" She took his hand and laid it against her soft cheek. "I suppose I may do *that*?" she said, with sardonic meekness.

"You may tell Mrs. Neddy, but nobody else," he said, frowning.

"I hate to wait even a day!" she retorted.

But she had to wait, for still Rose's letter of release did not come.

"It's just what I expected," Lyman told himself; "she won't even answer me!"

That Rose's spurning pride should keep her silent seemed to him perfectly natural—and strangely beautiful. She was like a snowy mountain peak, indifferent to the steamy darkness of the bogs of such a nature as his. In those waiting days he sat, frowning, in his empty office until the hour for patients was over; then he would go to see Lucy, and say, irritably:

"No. I *won't* kiss you till I'm free," at which Lucy laughed until the tears stood in her eyes.

Meantime Mrs. Neddy went home, bursting with the news, and sworn to secrecy. She kept the secret—except for Neddy. Helen said that no good wife kept anything from her husband—or his family, which is the same thing. But she almost wished she hadn't told the family, for when, at the supper table the first night she was at home, she hinted that "something was going to happen," then sighed because an Old Chester girl would be jilted; then said, outright, that she had reason to know, but was pledged to confidence as to names, that Doctor Holden wasn't happy with Rose Knight, having fallen in love with another young lady, and so had broken his engagement,—when Tom Dilworth's elderly daughter-in-law finally got this out,

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Thomas's roar of wrath frightened her almost to death! He got up and stamped around the room, and said words that made his Amelia hold up shocked hands.

"Tom! Dear! Not before the girls and Helen."

"That *pup* throw over Rose Knight? If he had waited five minutes, Rose would have thrown him over. Who is the hussy who's caught him, and where does she live?"

"I didn't mention her name," Helen gasped.

"Just as well. I don't want to know her name. It's enough to know her nature! And as for where she lives, so long as she doesn't live in Old Chester, it's nothing to me where she lives! If she keeps on stealing other girls' sweethearts, she'll live in h---"

"Thomas! Thomas! Remember Helen and the girls."

"I merely mean that we don't have that kind of queer fish in Old Chester, so that I don't give a tinker's damn—"

"*Thomas!*"

"—where she lives."

Neddy's wife, having drawn this torrent down upon her innocent head, was so scared that they couldn't get another word out of her; but after supper she slipped out and went into Mrs. Ezra's and asked for Edith. "I want to see her for a minute, alone," said Mrs. Neddy, looking quite pallid.

Rose, who had opened the front door for her, said that Edith was in her own room. "Go right upstairs, Helen," she said.

But with her foot on the lowest step, Helen Dilworth paused, and said, involuntarily: "Why, Rose! You are ill?"

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"No," said Rose, "just tired. Edith has gone to bed, but I'm sure she will be glad to see you."

Edith, in her bed, propped on a heap of pillows, and always glad to hear gossip, listened with wide eyes to Helen's revelation.

"I promised not to tell anybody," Helen said (she was really frightened) "but I've *got* to have advice!" Then came the news: The gentleman who had kissed Lucy was Lyman Holden.

Edith was so astounded she could only say, "Why! The *idea*!"

"Mr. Dilworth is *very* angry," his daughter-in-law said. "Oh, Edith, I'm scared to death, because everybody will be so down on Lucy! I'm sure she can't help Lyman's falling in love with her. What ought I to do?"

"Has he told Rose?"

"Yes. He has asked her to release him. He hadn't heard from her when I left Mercer. Oh dear, I almost wish Lucy would let go of him!"

"Rose wouldn't want him now," Edith said.

"Of course not. But what ought Lucy to do? People will be horrid to her!"

"She won't live here," Edith comforted her. "She'll live in Mercer, so it won't make any difference. . . . Oh, what a blow to Rose!"

Edith was "so pained for dear Rose" that she hurried Helen away so that she could tell Charles, who, of course, was "pained," too.

"It explains why she has looked so badly," Charles said. "I wonder how she answered him? I should have been willing to advise her how to express her-

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self—but Rose is too strong-minded to do what most refined females would do—leave such matters to the gentlemen of their families.”

Rose asked no advice from the gentlemen of her family, nor from anyone else. Perhaps that was why it took her so long to answer Lyman’s letter. At any rate, for five days Lucy “waited” to be kissed, and every day she said, impatiently, that Lyman certainly was queer! . . . Then Rose’s letter came. Lyman had been just about to start out to call on a patient, when, on the doorstep, he met the postman. He stood in the narrow hall, tore the envelope open, and read what Rose had to say. And as he read he drew in his breath, as if in actual physical pain:

I cannot answer you by letter. I must see you. Oh, I do pray I may help you! I know how dreadfully it hurt you to write to me. Will you come down to Old Chester soon?—perhaps on Saturday? We won’t tell people what has happened until we have talked it over.

Rose.

Lyman Holden went back into his office, and shut the door. . . . And he had thrown over this dignity, and understanding, and tenderness—for what?

He went to Old Chester on Saturday—went, as, it happened, in a crowded stage, where everybody knew him, and made a point of talking to him about Rose. When he reached Mrs. Ezra’s, Rose must have been waiting in the hall, for she opened the front door, before he could ring, and said: “We’ll go over to the school room, Lyman. It’s quiet there.” She had her hat and coat on, and, closing the door softly behind her, she went with him down the garden path,

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between the stalks of dead perennials standing gauntly in the snow.

"Are you well, Rose?" he said, trying to talk easily, and she said:

"Yes, thank you, Lyman."

After that they walked without further words, up the street to the church, and Rose unlocked the school room door set deep in the snow-powdered ivy leaves. When they entered he stood, silently, while she lit a lamp, for the February afternoon was falling into dusk; then she turned, and, deadly pale, asked one question—asked it without delay or circumlocution:

"Is it Lucy Hayes, Lyman?"

She waited for his answer with the blood pounding in her ears so that she could hardly hear him.

He said, very low and not looking at her, "Yes."

There was a silence. Lyman was sitting down, his hand over his mouth. She, standing, looked at him, and her own hands gripped each other until the knuckles were white. Then she said just six words:

"I can't . . . give you up, Lyman."

CHAPTER IV.

LYMAN HOLDEN gasped. The incredible unexpectedness of her words left him speechless. Then she began to talk, with a sort of breathless hurry:

"Lyman! I love you! I can make you happy—happier than she could,"—she caught at his arm, as if she would not let him escape; he *must* listen! Then she poured out explanatory arguments: "You would get tired of Lucy! You don't really love her. I know your love will come back to me!"

One wonders how even those astonishing women whom most of us know only through the newspapers—the impossibly vulgar women who figure in breach-of-promise cases—one wonders how even they can be fools enough to suppose that love can be "held"! But how a woman who is not a fool, a woman of dignity, of gracious loveliness—in fact, a lady,—how she can think it worth while to clutch at reluctant love, is inconceivable! It was staggering to Lyman Holden.

"I—I can't let you go!" Rose said; "I can't give you up!" Her voice broke here to a whisper; for a moment she hid her face in her hands. "I love you," she said.

Doctor Holden had nothing to say.

"You won't leave me?" she said.

He said, huskily, "No, Rose."

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"Promise me you won't see Lucy again!" she demanded, fiercely.

"You have my word," he said. His voice was shocked.

She looked at him dumbly for a moment. He drew a long breath and rose. She, dreadfully pale, got up, too; he waited for her in silence, his hand on the door knob, while she put out the lamp. In the darkness of the room he heard her say again, panting: "I love you. I *can't*"—he could hardly hear her voice—"give you up."

"I am not worth keeping," he warned her; "but of course I'm yours, if you want me."

"I do want you," she said; then, in a whisper, "Lyman . . . will you kiss me?"

He said, stammering, "Why, of course!" and kissed her; he felt her lips cold on his cheek.

"I would like to go home, please," she said faintly.

Without further words they went out of the school room and down the snowy road together. At Mrs. Ezra's door she said something about a headache, and he said he would say good-by now; and added that he must take the morning stage.

She nodded, and he left her. "I'll never break my word," he told himself as he plodded back through the snow to the tavern; but he was almost dizzy with astonishment.

The next morning he took the stage to Mercer. It being Sunday he was the only passenger, and on all that long, cold ride he could think without interruption: The first thing for him to do was to write to Lucy, and tell her. But then what? She would try to see him! He knew Lucy well enough to know *that*.

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. . . So what must he do to guard against the assault of her love? He was intensely angry at Lucy. We are most of us apt to be angry at the person who *even* accidentally destroys an ideal! Because of Lucy, Lyman's ideal had been shattered. The mountain peak—silent, dawn-flushed, inaccessible, and coldly indifferent to such as he—was gone. Instead, was a *woman* who could dispute with another woman for the love of —“a—a fellow like me!” His self-contempt was an aching misery, but he almost forgot it in the shock of this revelation of what Rose was. As for Lucy, except to plan an escape from her, he did not think *very* much about her; he only thought of Rose; and *over* and *over* he said—“How *can* she? Well, she *does*; that's all there is to it. And of course, I won't *break* my word.” Then he tried to decide what he *must* do to keep his word.

By the time he reached Mercer he had made up his mind. He would go away, and take a post-graduate course in something—anything! He didn't care *what*. But he would have to go away, he would have to *leave* Mercer, because, though he was angry at Lucy, he did not dare to face her. . . .

Lyman, cold and tired, jolting over the frozen wheel ruts in that long coach ride to Mercer, had moments of absolute fright when he thought of Lucy. He knew that if she once got hold of him again—eyes, hands, breaking voice, lips perhaps (oh, Rose had *asked* him to kiss her—how could she?) he would forget the injury Lucy had done him in destroying his Rose, he would forgive her, and his word to Rose would break under the strain. His body, not his mind, would be lost! So he must run—cowardice being, of

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course, in this particular kind of temptation, courage.

If Rose had been incredible to Lyman, Lyman was equally incredible to Lucy. When she read his letter saying he was not free, and that he was going away without seeing her again, she was confused and bewildered to the point of tears; then came the rally of anger, and the quick wheeling to attack. She flew to Lyman's office—he was not there. She went, breathless, to his sister's house—he was not there. "When had he left Mercer?"—"On last night's train." . . . He must have mailed the letter to her on the way to the station! She wavered as to whether or not to try to follow him—and save him from his crazy idea of keeping his word to Rose! But she was sufficiently of her generation to flinch at that. So she wrote him a little frantic appeal with "To be forwarded" on the envelope, and the quite futile "Haste! Haste!" in one corner, which in those days some people still added to their letters. But after she had written to him, she took up her weapon of revenge: she wrote to Old Chester! Instantly the truth began to leak out.

A leak? In a few days it was a torrent, not a leak! It began with Lucy's letter to Edith Welwood, which Edith, shocked and horrified (and delighted), quoted to Mrs. Ezra: "Lyman wished to break his engagement to Rose—but *she won't release him!*" The next minute poor Edith wished she had held her tongue. Never before, in all her leechlike existence under Mrs. Barkley's roof, had she encountered this kind of an Aunt Maria. This new Aunt Maria, instead of being gentle and humble, was suddenly a great lady, very calm, very brief, very cold. Edith was (this

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terrible Aunt Maria said) a person of vulgar mind, who, if she wished to remain under Mrs. Barkley's roof, was never to speak of Miss Rose Knight except with respect.

"My cousin," said Mrs. Ezra, "is incapable of wishing to marry a gentleman who does not wish to marry her. We will not refer to it again, if you please."

Naturally, the quaking Edith did not refer to it again—to Aunt Maria.

The next leak appeared in the Dilworth family: "My sister Lucy writes me—"

This was at supper. When Mrs. Neddy finished quoting Sister Lucy there was a tingling pause. For once the blustering Thomas did not bluster; if he damned the leak, it was in silence; he didn't even say he would bet on Rose; he said, very quietly, that his daughter-in-law was mistaken. Doctor Holden might wish to break his engagement, but if he did, there was no one on earth who would assist him in his enterprise more promptly than Rose Knight!

When the leak trickled in Doctor Lavendar's study it was laughed at.

"Nonsense!" said Doctor Lavendar. "If Lyman wanted to be free, Rose would drop him like a hot potato! As they are still engaged, it is evident that he hasn't wanted to." Then he said to William King, "Of course it's a lie, Willy; but who do you suppose started it?"

"I'm afraid it isn't a lie," Doctor King said, with a troubled look; for by this time Lyman's letter to Lucy had, thanks to Mrs. Neddy, been passed around among a few horrified friends. His laconic words, "Rose will not release me," left Old Chester dumb.

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Then everybody began to talk: Some were jocose, and said, "Miss Knight wants 'Mrs.' on her tombstone." And some said, "A *very* 'clinging vine!'" and they all added, "Well, she's wildly in love with him!"

Of course these were just the new people. The real Old Chester did not jest. It was silent, waiting for an explanation. But there was no explanation; just the fact—Doctor Holden had fallen in love with Lucy, *and Rose still wanted to marry him!* Nobody could understand; but only Mrs. Ezra had the courage to ask Rose what it meant. When she came into Rose's room one night and found her lying, wide-eyed, in the dark, the light from her candle gleamed on a wet streak on Rose's face. Mrs. Ezra's own cheeks were wet, too.

"My darling," she said, sitting down on the edge of the bed, "can you tell me about it?" ,

Rose looked at her speechlessly; then she got her voice steady. "It's only this, dear: I love Lyman."

"But, Rose, my darling—he isn't worthy of your affection!"

The candle shook so in old Mrs. Barkley's unsteady hands that Rose laughed, and blew the little wavering flame out; then, in the darkness, she said:

"Oh yes, dear, he is worthy; and *I* can make him happier than Lucy could. I know I can! And I—I love him."

Poor old Cousin Maria went back to her own room as bewildered as when she left it. *Rose* refusing to release a man who "wanted to marry another young lady," because she loved him? How could she love him? Where was her pride?

There were moments when Old Chester's confusion

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was so great that it was almost sympathy for Lyman. It was only Tom Dilworth who, holding on by his eyelids, so to speak, continued to say, "*I'll bet my bottom dollar on Rose.*"

But Old Chester thought that Thomas had lost his bet. "Of course," it said, "Rose knows that Lucy is not a girl of fine character; and she probably believes he would not be happy with her—but why does she want him herself?"

"She ought to let him go to the devil his own way?" said the rich Mr. Smith.

"Exactly!" said William King.

"How a refined young woman," said Mrs. Drayton—"I have always thought Rose refined, but I may have been mistaken;—how she can hold him against his will, is something I can't understand. She should merely say, 'Ephraim is joined to his idols,—let him alone.'"

Dr. Lavendar thereupon excused Rose—probably because he disliked Mrs. Drayton!—by saying that perhaps she wanted to keep Ephraim from idolatry? Which was all very well as a slap for Mrs. Drayton, but everybody knew that Rose wasn't trying to save Ephraim; she was trying, as Lucy's mother expressed it, "to get a husband!" She loved Lyman Holden—she said she did! Charles Welwood summed up the whole thing. He said that Rose's behavior was one of the signs of the times. "It is the outcome," said Charles, "of all this talk of the 'rights' of females—talk which will destroy the refinement of women and menace the very existence of the Home."

So that hot summer slipped away. Rose looked thin and tired, and Old Chester said, coldly, "No wonder!"

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We even became a little more sympathetic with Lucy, for poor Lucy was badly treated all round—Lyman returned two of her letters to him, unread! Old Chester knew this, thanks to sister Helen.

"It made Lucy furious," Helen confided to Edith Welwood; "but all the same, she's crying her eyes out, and pining away because he hasn't the courage to break with Rose."

"Crying her eyes out?" said Harry Mack. "I hope so!" But he was afraid Rose cried, too. Harry, glum and irritable, said that Rose had done *him* a good turn, anyway! So, in his gratitude, he used to go to see her, and once he told her he would get Lucy, yet! "And I guess that you will get—" But even good, outspoken, clumsy old Harry never quite dared to finish that sentence; he just said, stammering, "Say, Rose; Sawbones ain't fit to tie your shoe-strings."

At which she laughed, and said, "Oh, Harry, you flatter me!"

So Rose went on in the even tenor of her way, and taught school, and took care of Edith and the seventh baby, and fought to regain Lyman's heart by writing him gaily loving letters. Once, when Mrs. Drayton asked her when she and Lyman were going to be married, Rose said they hadn't decided; and once—just once—Doctor Lavendar ventured a remark. He came downstairs from the vestry and found her marking papers in the schoolroom, with a little wet ball of a pocket handkerchief on her desk. Doctor Lavendar stood and looked at her for a silent minute, then he spoke: he didn't say she must not love Lyman because Lyman wasn't worth loving; he did not appeal to that pride which she did not have; he did not even

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warn her that Love cannot be imprisoned by the bolts and bars of a promise; he only said:

"Rose, nobody can really be kept out of hell, *against his will*,—any more than he can be pushed into heaven against it. And furthermore, hell may save the soul;—but a straight jacket never can!"

Rose looked at him, then put her face down on her desk. . . . One of Lyman's letters had just come, and through all its patient friendliness she had read the shocked wonder that had spoken in his voice when she had told him that she "couldn't give him up." Those letters of his, which came faithfully all that summer, were not intimate, they were only gentle. Lyman had sobered very much in those months of hard study, and he had learned many things besides the knowledge that comes from textbooks. One of those knowledges was that it was better for a plain, everyday man like himself to marry a woman like Rose—not, to be sure, the Rose he had fallen in love with, glorious and remote! but a truly good Rose, a sensible, estimable Rose—much better to marry her, than a little being like Lucy, all fire and water and earthquakes! Lucy would be no kind of a wife for a doctor; besides, added to his irritation with her because she had happened to open his eyes to Rose, was the fact that now that he was out of the steamy jungle of her presence, he really didn't like her. So he thanked God (and Rose) for his escape from the jungle, and said to himself that probably there were no mountain peaks in the world. Once, in a letter, he told Rose how grateful he was to her for having saved him; and once he urged her to marry him in the early

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winter—but her cousin Maria was ill, so she couldn't, she said (reluctantly), leave Old Chester.

So they waited. And Old Chester settled down into cold disapproval of Rose, and real pity for Lucy. Some of the mothers said they didn't like to have their girls under Rose's influence, and they would send them to another school—if only there were another school! But there was nothing but the small, untidy public school where the poor children went; so Rose kept on teaching us the three R's.

Then the entirely unexpected happened. It was in October—eight months after Lyman's flight. . . . Lucy rarely came to Old Chester, so we thought she was "getting over" her disappointment; we did not, however, expect her to get over it in just the way she did:

Harry Mack got her!

The news came on the afternoon mail. Lucy's mother sent a distracted note to Neddy's wife. "They've eloped!" Lucy had retaliated. Lucy had said, in effect, "If he be not fair for me, what care I?"—and so forth.

"Of course he isn't in love with you," Harry told her; (he had dropped in to see her at her Aunt's house in Mercer;) "he was just fascinated for a minute or two. If he married you he'd be tired to death of you in six weeks. Besides, you don't really like him."

"I do—I do!"

"Be decent; let Rose have him. Look here: you are a wicked little thing—but I've never thought you were mean. If you were *mean*, I'd whistle you down the wind quicker 'n scat! Once I was afraid you'd write letters to Rose—that sort of skunk business.

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But I knew you wouldn't. I've stuck to you because I knew, that bad as you are, you're not mean. So don't be a dog in the manger! Let Rose have him, and let's us get married. Come on!"

"You're crazy! Besides, I hate freckles."

"Lucy, don't be silly. Honestly, you *may* go too far with me. I'm getting just the least little bit tired of this cat-and-mouse business. You can take me or leave me. This is the last time. I'll give you ten minutes to decide. Either I'll go and find another girl, and you can sit here and get wrinkled waiting for a man who can't (or won't—I don't know which; I rather think it's 'won't')—a man who won't take you, or you can marry me."

Harry took out his watch and snapped it open. Then he looked out of the window. After a while he said, "Five minutes, Lucy."

"Oh, I hate you!"

"Four minutes, my dear."

"Harry, you are a brute!"

"Well, you're an imp; so we'll be well mated. But we're neither of us fools, Lucy. We know we're made for each other. Three minutes."

"Harry, I—I won't—"

"Just as you please. One minute."

Silence.

Harry snapped his watch shut. "Well?"

"Oh—oh—oh—I don't know *why* I give in to you!"

"'Cause you love me, my dear. Come here and kiss me," he said, lazily—not stirring from his chair. It was almost as if he told her to pull off his boots for him! "Come—hurry up! Lucy, I *hope* I'll keep fond of you. But you'll have to work for it."

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She stood quite still and looked at him; then her face twitched. "Harry, I—I *was* mean, once; I'd rather you knew it. I wrote . . . that kind of a letter to—*to Rose.*"

Harry blinked hard, then he blew his nose. "Lucy," he said, huskily—and getting on to his feet with some alacrity—"I swear, you *are* worth working for! You've got truth in you, somewhere. I'll come and kiss *you*, my dear."

The day after the astounding news of Harry's success arrived in Old Chester, Rose Knight went away. She pinned up a wonderful and delightful notice on the school door, which ran thus:

NO SCHOOL UNTIL NEXT MONDAY.

Every hour of her three days' absence was planned for—the stage journey to Mercer, the sleeping-car across the mountains, the hour with Lyman. . . . Hour? Five minutes would be enough! She would take a parlor at the Girard House, and he would come (she had telegraphed him to meet her at the Girard House) and she would say, "*Now* you are free!" The sound in her own ears of those releasing words was like balm upon some dreadful wound.

She did not sleep that night in the journey over the mountains. Her mind went back to the day of shock and confusion, when Lyman's letter had come telling her he must not marry her. She remembered how she had opened it carelessly, to read it as she walked up the street. She remembered how her head suddenly swam, and she stood still with her hand on somebody's gatepost, staring at the unbelievable words. . . . Then she had walked home with a queer feeling in her knees, and with a cold thrill running up and

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down her back. "Thank Heaven, I didn't faint!" Rose thought, lying there in her berth, watching the green curtains of her section sway with the swaying car. No, she had not fainted; on the contrary, she had gone down to supper, and talked and laughed with Mr. and Mrs. Ezra, and played with the little Charleses. And then she had gone up to her own room. . . .

Remembering those next few days, Rose wondered how she had kept on playing with the little Charleses. For while she played, she was learning—all her pride fighting against the knowledge—that love may be measured, not by the worthiness of the Beloved, but by his need. Rose's love was gauged by what she must give up to save Lyman's happiness: her cousin Maria's respect—in its place bewildered pity; Old Chester's respect—in its place shocked disapproval, yes, and disgust! Lyman's respect—and in its place anger, and cruel disillusionment, and more than that, more terrible than that, a real justification of his wish to be released. Any man would wish to be released from the sort of woman who wouldn't want to release him! Rose pushed aside the window shade, and looked out at the flying landscape and the changeless stars. Yes, she had destroyed his ideal of her. She would have saved it, if she had let him marry Lucy; then she, Rose, would have remained, in his inevitable and enshrining remorse, forever lovely and forever proud. Now, she was only a weak, selfish woman; oh, a vulgar woman! A woman so wildly in love that she held to the shadow of Love when the substance had gone!

She remembered how she had battled against this

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last temptation to save for Lyman his own belief in her. She knew the very minute when Love, wrestling with Pride (which had clutched at this frantic disguise of selfishness), finally conquered, and cast Pride out. She had been kneeling, her head on her arms, her hands clenched; and then, suddenly, assurance came.

"I *will* save him. What does it matter what he thinks of me? If I were his wife, I would fight to save him from a woman like Lucy; *I'll fight now.*"

She had risen from her knees, trembling and serene, and, going over to the window, stood for a few profoundly tired moments watching the winter dawn. She was too exhausted to think out ways and means in which she, a proud and generous woman, could "fight" a girl like Lucy—a pretty, shallow, common creature, of harmless lies and little tempers, and the cowardice of anonymous letter writing. She only knew that Lucy's bludgeon blows of passion must be parried by this subtle, invisible weapon of selflessness. To wield that two-edged sword successfully, no one must know that it was a sword—Lyman least of all! He must believe her entirely loving and repulsive. She must say, "*I cannot give you up.*" She must beg him to "promise" to be true to her! She must *ask* him to kiss her. . . . Unless she did all these things, throwing herself into the fight without a single protecting shred of self-respect, he would suspect her sacrifice and refuse it.

And she had kept up this "love," in her letters. She thought of her letters now, and almost sobbed. . . . She wondered if Doctor Lavendar had seen through it all? She thought of his warning, now: if Lyman

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had the *will* to choose unhappiness, he had better be unhappy. He had even implied that hell might be Lyman's salvation! "Oh, he was wrong!" she said, "I was right!"

And now Lyman was saved, and here she was, hurrying—hurrying over the mountains, to say, "I will give you up!" And what would he say when he knew that the "giving up" came too late? Her mind whirled with possibilities. Would he be furious with Lucy, or would he be heartbroken? He would, of course, be very terribly angry with Rose. She had heard that a drowning person struggles and strikes at his rescuer. Well, in all these months of humiliation Lyman's rescuer had been bruised and beaten! But he had been saved—saved from unhappiness with Lucy! That did not mean of course, that he would have happiness without Lucy. He would always feel that but for Rose's interference he would have been happy. Yes, oh yes, he would be furiously angry at her. . . . Well, what difference did that make? He was saved ("Of course Doctor Lavendar was wrong!") He was saved, and now he was free. . . .

And so was she.

The relief of it was so overwhelming to her that when she found him waiting for her in that small, dark, private parlor in the Girard House, Rose could hardly speak. He was standing at the window, between the dingy red rep curtains, looking down into the street, and as he turned quickly and came toward her she began to pant.

"Lyman," she said, faintly. She stood with her back against the door, clutching at the door knob behind her, for she was trembling. "Oh, Lyman—"

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For a minute, looking at her face—older, and sad and white—he himself was hardly able to speak. “I love her!” he thought, with a sudden wave of tenderness. . . . “Rose, dear! What is it?” He took her hand and led her to a sofa and sat down beside her, looking at her anxiously. “Rose! You are perfectly exhausted. What has happened?”

“Lyman, you will be angry at me. I—I am going to pain you. But I have to. Lyman, Lucy is married.”

“Married?”

“She has married Harry Mack. I have come—oh, I have hurried, hurried, Lyman—to tell you you are free—from me. Now—*now* I can release you. Lyman, I give you up. You remember I said I ‘couldn’t give you up’? Now I can, I do! Oh, Lyman, indeed, indeed, it was better for me to save you from her. But I know you hate me for it. You will never want to hear my name again. But I don’t care. Even if you hate me, I don’t care! I have saved you.”

“But Rose—what do you mean? What are you talking about? Lucy married? What is that to me? As for being free—I’m engaged to you! I can’t be ‘free.’”

But she had broken. She dropped her face down on the arm of the old horsehair-covered sofa, and tried not to sob. Her words came with long pauses:

“I don’t . . . know how I’ve . . . lived through it!”

“Lived through what?”

“Holding you. . . . Everybody knew I held a man who didn’t want me. And I—asked you to kiss me.” There was a shuddering rush of tears.

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He was dumb. It came over him, in a surge of horrified understanding, just what she had done—and what he had done, too. He had taken her protection (and been increasingly grateful for it) but he had never guessed the cost to her! “‘Everybody knew’?” he said, under his breath. “How did they know? . . .

“You mean she *told*—? Good God!” His rage at Lucy made him spring up and stride about the room. “She *told*? And nobody guessed that you did it for me?” He stopped short and groaned—he himself had not guessed. “And nobody defended you?” He struck his clenched hand on his mouth—*he* had not defended her.

“Oh yes, yes,” she said, eagerly. “Harry Mack came to see me. I *think* he knew. And Mr. Dilworth said once—Edith told me—that he’d ‘bet on Rose’. You know he always used to say that,” she said, smiling, though her dark, humorous eyes shone with tears. “But Lyman, never mind all that; that’s nothing! You are safe . . . and you are free. Doctor Lavendar thought you had a right to be unhappy. He thought that hell—he called it hell; and of course an unhappy marriage *is* hell—might be best for you . . . if you wanted it. But, oh, I knew he was wrong! I couldn’t let you be unhappy! And now you’ll marry somebody else, and be happy! You won’t ever see me again.”

He knelt down beside her in silence; he was saying to himself, passionately, “I can never make it up to her—never!” . . . His snowy mountain peak was back in his sky.

But she had raised her head and was smiling. “Perhaps, some day, you will forgive me. You hate me

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now. But, oh Lyman, if you had married her you would have been—”

“Rose—for God’s sake, *stop!* Married her? If I’d married her, I should have got—what I deserved.”

Involuntarily—not pausing to reflect that deserts will sometimes cure deep and fundamental defects—Rose sprang to Lucy’s defense. “Don’t say that! She’s only selfish and shallow, and a little false; but I knew that after a while, when you found her out, you would be wretched; I knew—Why, Lyman! What is it, dear? Lyman!”

His face was on her knees, and his shoulders shook.

“Lyman?” she said, faintly. She did not understand.

“You *suffered*,” he said hoarsely.

“What does that matter? I saved you.”

“Rose”—he got up and sat beside her—“I wasn’t worth saving, and of course you’ll say you can’t marry me, but—”

Her recoil of horrified astonishment was like a stab.

“I knew you’d feel that way,” he said, humbly; “I wasn’t asking you to—*yet*; but—” Her blank amazement silenced him.

“*I?* Marry *you?*” she said.

They were both standing now, and he had caught her hands in his. “I know you can’t, now,” he agreed; “but give me another chance, Rose. You’ve saved me. You own me! You’ve paid a price for me. I’m not worth the price, God knows—but you own me! And oh, Rose, I really do believe you love me—worthless as I am—”

“Nothing would induce me—”

He was silent.

NEW FRIENDS IN OLD CHESTER

"I will never marry anyone, but you least of all." She pulled her veil down over her face with trembling fingers. "Good-by, Lyman," she said. Then the despair in his eyes was too much for her; she came back and put her hand on his arm. "Don't be unhappy. We'll always be friends."

He did not speak. He followed her to the door, and as she said again, "Good-by," he lifted her hand, and, though she tried to draw it away from him, held it hard against his lips. "You've bought me. Remember that. I'm yours . . . always." Then he went back and sat down on the sofa, his face hidden in his hands.

Down in the street the door of a waiting hack banged; then he heard the sound of wheels. She had gone. . . .

It was some time during the next few weeks, just as Old Chester was getting its breath after the Harry and Lucy marriage, that things began to be said about Rose Knight and Lyman. It came out that Rose had "thrown Lyman over"—that Rose wanted to be "released," and Lyman wanted to hold her to her word.

"*What!*" said Old Chester. "What? It is Lyman who won't release Rose—not Rose who won't release Lyman? Upon my word!" said Old Chester, "what is the truth?"

Harry Mack said he knew, but he wouldn't tell. Harry was, so far as we could make out, the source of this astonishing gossip; but Tom Dilworth backed him up. Mr. Dilworth said he had his information straight from poor Holden.

"I saw him in Mercer the other day," Mr. Dilworth

NEW FRIENDS IN OLD CHESTER

said. "He's mad about Rose, but Rose," Tom said, "won't look at him. I'm sorry for the poor devil, but what can you expect? I've always bet on Rose!"

William King said, "Of course our Rose won't make any gray-mare-better-horse marriage!"

Mrs. Ezra said, "The young man has got his deserts; my cousin wouldn't think of marrying him."

Edith Welwood said, "Why, the very *idea*!" And Charles added, "Rose has always been lacking in delicacy, but even she could not demean herself by marrying Doctor Holden."

Harry Mack, dribbling out information, said Holden had told him the whole story. Harry implied, in a burst of imagination, that the doctor had "gone down on his knees" to Rose, who "gave him an icy mitten. But *I* said," Harry declared, "spit on your hands, man, and try again."

Lucy looked at him blackly when he said this, but she made no comment. (Their marriage really turned out pretty well, for she was always afraid of her husband.)

"If the doctor gets her," Harry told Doctor Lavendar, "he'll be the luckiest man around—except me. If a fellow has to work like the devil to get a girl, you can bet they'll be happy. Holden will have to work like Sam Hill before Rose will take him on again, and maybe call a bluff—same as I did for Lucy. But he'll get her!"

"He may marry her," said Doctor Lavendar—"she's the stuff the martyrs are made of. But he'll never 'get her.'"

But this was too deep for dear old Harry, who scowled with perplexity, and said "Huh?"

THE END

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